

# FOUNDATIONS

SERMONS ON GENESIS 1-3

Peter H. Holtvlüwer

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## Reformed Reading Room

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*For my parents, **Hendrik & Susanna Holtvliüwer**,  
who taught me how to build on these foundations*



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# FOREWORD

**Clarence Stam**

Hamilton, Ontario  
September, AD 2010

## *Textual Preaching*



It is a great privilege that Rev. P. Holtvlüwer asked me to write a brief introduction to his planned publication of sermons on the first chapters of the book Genesis. Written sermons are always put to good use in public worship services or in personal Bible study. When these sermons deal with a single Bible book or parts of a Bible book, we have the added benefit of using them as a study guide on that Bible book. The book of Genesis is an excellent selection because it is basic to all the teaching of the Christian Church.

The book Genesis itself needs no introduction from my side. I am very happy and content to let Holtvlüwer's sermons speak for themselves. Genesis is the first Bible book, and as such it is introductory to the *whole* Bible, both Old and New Testament. We cannot understand the work of the Prophet Moses without the work of the Apostle Paul.

Every sermon is to be a guide to Christ Jesus our Lord, in whose life and ministry all the promises of old are fulfilled and being fulfilled. I am thankful Peter Holtvlüwer has kept this Christological perspective clearly in mind. All preaching is to be the preaching of the Gospel, the word of Christ.

The book Genesis is constantly the topic of much debate and dissension. But Holtvlüwer's approach is clear, straightforward, and pastoral. The text of Scripture is opened to the reader (and hearer). This is especially important again in our times when much of Scripture, including especially the book Genesis, is considered to be of little value. Even if not everyone will always agree with Holtvlüwer's precise exegesis, these published sermons still speak strongly and merit wider attention. The book Genesis comes to life in these finely crafted sermons.

I am happy to see another good manuscript going to the presses. Our ministers need to write, if possible, and should be encouraged to do so when the gift becomes apparent. I hope that we will see more of Rev. P. Holtvlüwer's work in the future. Not everyone, not even every minister, has the gift to write well. Holtvlüwer does show this gift, and it must be exploited to the maximum for the up-building of Christ's church.

What I like most about this book is that it presents us with a fine example of "textual preaching." Sometimes a minister reads a text or passage but never in the sermon later explains the text. The text is forgotten as the sermon grows. But textual preaching focuses on the chosen text, explains that text, and applies the message of that text in no uncertain terms. If the preacher does indeed preach the text, he will have a *new* message every Sunday. This is what attracts hearers and makes them come back to church, Sunday after Sunday.

Textual preaching is academically sound, exegetically astute, and spiritually energizing. This is how it should be done, and I most heartily urge our membership to take and read this book.

## PREFACE

**Kenneth E. Wieske**

Recife, Pernambuco  
August, AD 2010



I'm delighted to have the privilege of penning a short preface to this book of sermons by Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer. In the first chapters of Genesis the foundations of the gospel are laid out: God teaches us about His perfect, holy creative work; He reveals to us the cause of our sin and misery (the Fall); and He sets before our eyes His merciful response of sovereign grace in Christ, the Seed of the woman.

If you've been raised in a Reformed home, you could possibly run the danger of considering these matters so basic that they no longer merit much time for reflection. Could it be sometimes that many years of handling and hearing the Scriptures produces a familiarity which threatens to dim our eyes to the glorious power of God's revelation?

It is striking to see the impact of these simple yet profound truths in the lives of those who do not know them. In our weekly theological lectures at the Reformed Reading Room we witness this first-hand. The group (which fluctuates between 30 to 50 people per evening) is made up of all kinds of people, many who even consider themselves Christians when they first attend. After all, more than 90% of Brazilians are nominally Christians. Yet, they have only a faint notion of a God who made the universe (at least on Sunday: during the week they tend more towards Darwin's explanation);

they have a faint notion that not all is well with the creation and the human race, but they're not quite convinced that the Fall was a total disaster; and they have a faint notion that Jesus is fairly important (especially in the area of health care and job security), but they're fairly certain that they can go a long way towards undoing the Fall and its effects by their own efforts.

It is marvellous to see the effects when the glorious truths of the biblical, Reformed faith come crashing into their lives, exploding the petty humanistic creeds and superficial religiosity which had been guiding their minds and hearts. Sinners learn to wonder at the sovereign majesty and glory of Almighty God who created all things and upholds them by the word of His power; they learn to tremble, detest themselves and humble themselves before God as they discover the real depths, horror and the foulness of sin; and they are compelled to seek their cleansing and salvation outside of themselves as they hear of the One who was bruised for our transgressions when He crushed the head of the serpent.

It is no exaggeration to say that we see the Holy Spirit use these simple, powerful Gospel truths to produce a radical transformation of lives, hearts, marriages, and families. Directly or indirectly, the work of the Reformed Reading Room has contributed to over 80% of the growth of the Reformed Church in Recife over the last 10 years. It has also contributed to lesser or greater reformations of liturgy and preaching in many so-called "evangelical" churches in this city and in the state of Pernambuco.

We are thankful that Rev. Holtvlüwer has generously offered to direct any funds raised from the sale of this book to support the work of the Reformed Reading Room. We are hopeful that, if the Lord permits, enough funds might be raised to finance the translation and printing of this book in Portuguese. If these published sermons will be a great blessing for reading elders and personal and group Bible studies in Canada, how much greater the blessing will be for God's people in Brazil, where there is a terrible dearth of solid, Reformed material on the Old Testament.

## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

**Peter H. Holtvlüwer**

Carman, Manitoba  
August, AD 2010



### The Background

In the spring of 2005 I began my ministry in the Canadian Reformed Church at Carman (East) with a series of sermons on the first three chapters of Genesis. This series apparently struck a chord with the congregation to the point where I received several requests for written copies. That's where my problems started. You see, I have an innate fear of publishing! Doubly so when it comes to sermons.

The problem with sermons is – as every preacher knows – that they are crafted in the midst of life's demands. In the pastorate, every week visits need to be made, Catechism needs to be taught, your family needs attention, meetings need to be attended. There is only so much time available. Only so many resources can be consulted and only so much pondering and meditation can be undertaken. The ticking of the clock goes on relentlessly. As the man said: "Sunday's comin' brother!" And then as a preacher you have to make *two* sermons per week! There's very little time for refining the writing and so sermons go to the pulpit without a lot of 'spit and polish.'

The end result is that it is nothing short of a miracle of grace that a preacher has anything edifying – let alone "inspiring" – to say! An average sermon in our circles is probably around 3500 words. To make those words

coherent and understandable is already a gift. To have those words accurately explain and apply a portion of God's Word is thanks only to the Holy Spirit on whom the minister is extremely dependant. To cause those words to stir the heart and compel the will is entirely beyond the jar of clay who knows only too well how his sermon is fraught with many weaknesses and shortcomings. The preacher is thankful that God works through him despite him, that listeners on a given Sunday may indeed be edified, but that still does not leave him any confidence to put those sermons in print for all to read and evaluate! At least, that has been my experience, my struggle.

However, the Lord had His way of showing me that as much as He can use my frail efforts to edify *listeners* of the preaching, so He is more than capable to use those same sermons to edify *readers*. The Lord used the congregation in Carman which, in a gentle but persistent way, kept after me to publish, reassuring me of their good value. Thank-you, brothers and sisters, for your persistence and your patience with me. Your efforts have finally "paid off" and I only pray these sermons will prove as edifying in print as you remember them being from the pulpit.

## The Series

To undertake preaching on any part of God's Word is a daunting task but I found it a special challenge to do so on these early chapters of Genesis. In the first place, the Holy Spirit, through the hand of Moses, introduces us to a number of key building blocks that not only lay the foundations for the rest of the Bible but also for our daily life! In the opening verses we meet the Creator and His amazing, incomprehensible work of creation. The origins of the universe, of life itself are explained and in that explanation we begin to find life's purpose and meaning. On the sixth day God creates man in His own image and charges him with care of the *cosmos*, a fact which has profound implications for all human life. Then we are taught about the blessing of the seventh day, the beautiful day of rest on which the world-wide week of seven days continues to be patterned!

Still there is more. These three chapters serve to highlight the meaning of the name, "Genesis" which means, "beginnings," for one passage after another presents us with a new beginning. In chapter 2, among other things we learn about the introduction of marriage, of how God in a unique and wondrous way gave wife to husband and husband to wife in holy wedlock! Then follows chapter 3 with the haunting record of sin's entry into paradise and the terrible repercussions this had for man's relationship with his Maker. But no sooner do sin and death enter creation than the Creator comes with a promise to salvage and restore what was lost in a new creation through a promised Saviour! Clearly, in these three chapters God is revealing to us the origins, genesis and beginnings of all things – of creation, fall and redemption!

It is for this reason that I chose to call this collection of sermons, *Foundations*. In these chapters God has revealed the fundamentals of His work: His work of creation plus His work of re-creation! By revealing these first and basic things, the LORD is calling us to build our lives on these foundations. It is no understatement to say that to understand the entire Bible correctly and to live rightly with the Maker, one needs to understand these three chapters correctly. Start off on the wrong foundation and you will end up with an entirely different structure than the one envisioned by the Architect, a skewed and faulty one. Your life will not be in synch with your Creator and your future with Him may be in great jeopardy. The weight of this truth lay constantly on my mind in the making of these sermons.

## The Book Of Genesis

To get it right, the book of Genesis as a whole and these three chapters in particular must be understood as a straight-forward, literal historical account. While there may be elements of poetry and symmetry, that takes nothing away from the factual historicity of all that is written here. This is so not because that is my bent but because that is how the Holy Spirit



presents it. He has structured the book of Genesis according to ten “toledoths,” a Hebrew word translated in the NIV as, “account” (e.g. Genesis 2:4; 5:1 etc). Think of a *toledoth* in general as family history record. Each *toledoth* outside of these chapters is indisputably a written record of a particular patriarch such as Adam (5:1), Terah (11:27), Isaac (25:19) or Jacob (37:2). There is nothing a-historical or purely literary or symbolic about those accounts. Each of these men was a real person who lived in a particular time and place. Thus when God in Genesis 2 describes in detail the creation of man (which took place on the sixth day), and does so under the rubric of a *toledoth* of the heavens and the earth (v.4), He is indicating that it should be understood with the same literal historicity as with all the other *toledoths*.

### **The Old Testament on Genesis as History**

In addition to that internal structure of Genesis, the Holy Spirit indicates through the rest of the Bible that these chapters are to be taken as historical accounts, that the details are to be understood as real facts and the persons as actual people who walked the earth. Think, for example, of the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:11 (cf. Exodus 31:17) which references God’s creation of the world in six days. We are commanded to work for as many as six days but to rest on the seventh day, just as the LORD Himself did at creation. That reference makes no sense if God did not create the world in six literal days, each with a morning and an evening, as Genesis 1 describes!

A number of psalms describe at length God’s creation of all things (Psalm 8, 90, 104). Others refer to the power of His creative Word (Psalm 33:6,9) or to His establishing of the sun and moon (Psalm 74:16; 136:8,9). Psalm 103:14 and Psalm 8:5,6 respectively recall God’s specific act of creating man from the dust of the earth (as Genesis 2:7 states) and yet bestowing upon him the lofty position of ruler (Genesis 1:27,28). It is well-known that Israel used such poetry in part to teach their children the history of God’s grace-filled dealings with them (see as a prime example Psalm 78).

Poetry and history were never mutually exclusive for Israel (nor are they so today!). The poetry is based on the factual record of Genesis 1 and 2 and is itself inspired history!

We find the same dependency on the trustworthiness of Genesis’ opening chapters in other parts of the Old Testament. Prophets like Jeremiah take for granted that the LORD stretched out the heavens and ordered the cycle of day and night (Jeremiah 10:12; 31:35; 33:20) as Genesis 1 details. Proverbs 8:22-31 declares that Wisdom was present in all of God’s original handiwork when He founded the earth. In Job 38:4-8 the LORD speaks directly about laying “the earth’s foundation,” marking off “its dimensions,” and shutting up the “sea behind doors,” all of which hearkens back to His acts recorded in Genesis 1.

### **The New Testament on Genesis as History**

The New Testament, too, everywhere assumes the Genesis account to be literal and historical. The Apostle Paul, with Genesis 1 clearly in mind, proclaimed to the men of Athens that God made the world and everything in it, even going so far as to allude to the creation of Adam: “From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth” (Acts 17:24-26). Paul assumes that Adam was a real person and makes a direct parallel between the first Adam and Christ whom he calls the last Adam (see Romans 5:14-19 & 1 Corinthians 15:22,45). The human ancestry of Jesus is itself traced right back to Adam by none other than Paul’s travelling companion, Luke the doctor (Luke 3:23-38).

God’s creative work in forming the earth out of no pre-existing matter is clearly stated in Hebrews 11:3, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (see also Romans 4:17 and Revelation 4:11). Since the New Testament mentions it at least three times, it is a matter of importance for us to know that alongside the Father at creation was God the Son, “through

whom He made the universe” (Hebrews 1:3; cf. John 1:3, Colossians 1:15,16). These revelations are rooted in the historical realities of Genesis 1.

Even more, the Lord Jesus Himself refers to the persons and events of these three chapters as simple matters of fact. He speaks of the time of “the beginning, when God created the world” (Mark 13:19), a reference to Genesis 1:1. He describes the devil in John 8:44 as, “a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him,” an unmistakable allusion to the deceitful serpent of Genesis 3 (cf. Revelation 12:9).

On another occasion Christ quoted the last verses of Genesis 2 concerning marriage to instruct the Pharisees that, “what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matthew 19:6). He went on to say that divorce was not God’s intention for it was “not that way from the beginning” (Matthew 19:8), an obvious reference to Genesis 1:1 and the context of the creation week in which marriage was clearly instituted on the sixth day (compare Genesis 1:27 with Genesis 2:18-25). If marriage came thousands or millions of years after Genesis 1:1 as some suggest, how could it rightly be referred to as being established in “the beginning?” Further, when it came to defending God’s purpose in giving the Sabbath Day, the Lord Jesus didn’t go back to the days of Moses and Israel but to the origin of this day in Genesis 2, “The Sabbath was made for *man*, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28). If the account in Genesis 1-3 is not literal and historical, and its days are not days of regular length, these words of Christ make little sense and that in turn would call into question the other teachings of Christ and ultimately His saving work.

## The Saviour

A second special difficulty I encountered was to explain how each text relates in some way to the Person and work of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Christ Himself said that the Scriptures testify about Him (John 5:39; cf.

Luke 24:44). Most of the Bible, however, reveals to us life *after* the fall into sin. In preaching from almost anywhere in Scripture we are accustomed to seeing how the passage relates in some way to especially the *saving* work of Christ centered in His death on the cross. But where can the cross be found in a world where there is as yet no sin (Genesis 1 *and* 2)? How do the creation of all things, the forming of man in the image of God, the establishment of the Sabbath, the planting of the Garden of Eden, the creation of woman and the ordinance of marriage all in the paradise situation relate to Jesus and His cross? The reader will have to judge in how far I was successful in properly finding the links to Christ in these early chapters.

## The Sermons

Allow me a word yet on the sermons themselves. I have chosen to leave them as sermons, that is, as the *spoken* messages they were intended to be and not *written prose* intended first for readers. Sermons are oral events in the first place and although I write out each sermon in full, I always try to write them as I would speak them. For this reason you will find sentences which are incomplete or which begin with “and,” “but,” “for” or some other conjunction. You will likely wince at split infinitives, contractions, run-on sentences, over-use of the hyphen and many more grammar and syntax transgressions. For them all I ask in advance for your forgiveness and indulgence.

The advantage of keeping the spoken language is that the sermons may be easier to understand because the style is simpler – hopefully familiar-sounding, like daily conversation. In this way I hope they may serve as devotional reading, perhaps on a quiet evening or a Sunday afternoon. Leaving the sermons in their “speaking” form should make it easier for them to be used in a public worship service, for which I hope they may find some use as well. Because they are explanations of a given passage, please

have your Bible in hand to refer to the text and investigate references I make. By all means, be noble like the Bereans and examine the Scriptures to see whether what I say is true (Acts 17:11).

Sermons are also oral messages given at a particular time and place. They may be used profitably in other circumstances and found edifying because God's Word is living and active but they cannot be fully appreciated in their present form unless the original context is kept in mind. For example, these sermons were written by a young pastor just entering his second congregation. The congregation they were written for is centered in Carman, Manitoba, a prairie town dominated economically by agriculture. The church is Reformed, largely made up of second and third generation Dutch-Canadians. Many more factors lie behind various nuances of explanation and application but my point is that a sermon can never be divorced from its setting. For that reason, virtually all of the local references have been left in so that the reader may 'hear' the authentic sermon in its original setting and may perhaps discern a fuller meaning. Those who read these sermons in a public worship service may feel free to adjust those local references to suit their own situation. A chart of the text, Scripture reading and song selection for each sermon may be found in the appendix.

## The Thanks

In addition to the Carman (East) congregation who motivated this publication, I would like to thank Monique Graafland who spent many hours proof-reading the manuscript. She proved to be a sharp-eyed editor and at the same time a cheerful source of encouragement to finish this project. Kelvin Vanderveen has served to coordinate local interest and assist with the organization of the final product – many thanks, Kelvin! My previous pastor, long-time mentor and now colleague and friend Rev. Klaas (Clarence) Stam, was gracious enough to read over the sermons and provide feedback on doctrinal and homiletical matters. The sermons are the better

for his critique. I'm also very grateful for the foreword he provided. Rev. Theodore VanRaalte, my seminary class-mate and one-time colleague in Classis Manitoba, also gave of his time to review parts of the manuscript from a doctrinal point of view. Thanks Ted. His remarks served to refine some points and strengthen my resolve on others. Of course, I alone remain responsible for whatever shortcomings you may find on these pages.

Whatever proceeds may be generated by the sale of this publication will go to benefit the Reformed Reading Room of Recife, Brazil. This is a project established under the tutelage of another seminary class mate and now missionary in northern Brazil, Rev. Kenneth Wieske. Thank-you, Ken, for your warm support of this publication and for introducing us to the Reformed Reading Room in a preface. May the Lord richly bless all efforts to establish the foundations of the true, biblical faith in Brazil!

The Lord in His grace has provided additional sources of help and incentive. My friend Arie Veenendaal has lent his usual enthusiasm and optimism to both the contents and the presentation of this product. As an elder he convinced me: "These sermons won't do anyone any good collecting dust in the back of a filing cabinet!" As a creative consultant he and his staff at Kik Associates provided the flair and professionalism to see the manuscript covered, printed and bound as you have it in your hand. Thank-you, Arie, for your unflinching support and generous assistance!

The last person I must thank is the one who is most responsible for prompting and aiding in the completion of this project, my dear wife Erica Holtvlüwer. She is indeed God's precious gift to me, the one He selected as a true helper fit for me! Without her love and support I can hardly imagine doing the work of sermon-writing in the first place, let alone publishing a volume of sermons! Thank-you for the countless coffee-chats over exegesis and application, style and tone, word choice and publication details, even the value of having an ISBN! Honestly, Er, I couldn't have

done it without you!

These thirteen sermons are in a way nothing special. Yet God has used them once to build up the faith of His people. May He do so again for many more people through this publication so that His Name be glorified, His Kingdom advanced and His will be done! To Him belongs the ultimate thanks and praise for bringing this project to completion and for whatever good it may accomplish.

## MEET YOUR MAKER

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.  
Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface  
of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

— Genesis 1:1,2



**T**his morning we begin a series of sermons on the first chapters of Genesis. I thought it might be fitting if together we begin at “the beginning.” These chapters are at once very familiar and yet, for that reason, very challenging. I mean, most children know the creation days by grade three, right? We’re all very familiar with the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Adam and Eve. Is it really worthwhile to spend time in the preaching on these chapters?

And yet, brothers and sisters, it is fitting and important to slow down and dig deep into the treasures of these opening chapters of Genesis, for they are the foundation of everything that follows – not just in the book of Genesis, but in the whole Bible. The LORD, in His providential care, has placed Genesis as the first book in Scripture and in it we find the blue-print for all of Scripture. Get Genesis wrong and you’ll get the rest of the Bible wrong too.

You can see this in the many controversies that rage over these chapters. Evolutionists outright deny any creative activity of God whatsoever, while others mix evolution together with creation. And among those who confess the Name of Christ there are those who hold to the “Gap Theory” and the “Framework Hypothesis,” and much ink has been spilled arguing whether a day in Genesis 1 is really just a day. Others believe that Genesis 1-11 isn’t really historical fact at all, but rather an imaginative, poetic recounting of the origins of the world.

And the conclusions people draw from these chapters affect their beliefs in the rest of Scripture. If Adam and Eve weren’t real, historical people, for example, then marriage may not necessarily be between one man and one woman after all! And if there wasn’t a *first* Adam who sinned, should we really believe there was a *second* Adam, a last Adam who worked salvation (cf. 1 Corinthians 15)?

So let’s pay careful attention also to this part of God’s Word where He introduces Himself to us for the first time, where He sets the stage for all of history, including our own time.

I proclaim to you this Word of God:

### *Meet Your Maker*

1. **The Creator**
2. **The creation**
3. **The care**

## **The Creator**

Our text begins with these familiar words: “In the beginning God...” And when you think about it, these are remarkable words. It’s almost as if we’ve missed a chapter in the story. Moses, the author, introduces the main subject of the account (i.e. God) without any explanation whatsoever of who He is:

“In the beginning God...” Moses does not try to explain the origin of God – where He came from, how He exists, or who He is exactly. There is no philosophical inquiry whatsoever. There is no proof offered for God’s existence like so many demand today, but rather we find a simple, profound statement of faith: *in the beginning God*.

It’s a key point to keep in mind when we engage in evangelism work. The Bible never tries to prove that God exists. It simply confesses it. Some Christian theologians and apologists have tried to use reason and logic to *prove* the existence of God, but that’s an unfruitful path to follow. For if God has not given us that scientific proof in the Bible, how do we ever think we’ll find it?

Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying we should cast aside all reasoned arguments for God’s existence. The LORD has also given us a mind with the ability to think and reason. With careful thought and analysis we may be able to help remove an obstacle in someone’s thinking about God. God’s existence and activity certainly are reasonable and logical and can make sense to the mind, but at the end of the day they are not *provable*. Accepting that God exists is a matter of faith, not science. It’s not a matter of winning the *argument*, but it’s always a matter of winning the *heart* of someone, a change that only God’s Spirit can bring about through the Word.

“In the beginning God.” On the one hand, these words mean there was an absolute beginning. It does not speak of “a” beginning or any old beginning but “the” beginning – the very first beginning! Before that, there was nothing. Before that, there was no creation, no matter, no stuff – only God Himself!

For that’s the other thing these words mean: God was there. God simply was. He simply existed at the time of the beginning, which must mean that God existed also *before* the beginning. God Himself has no beginning. He is before all things and above all things. We learn something

about God's essence here, Beloved. He is eternal and transcendent, that is, God is timeless and boundless in His presence. We sang about that in Psalm 90:1: "From everlasting stands Thy holy throne / to everlasting Thou art God alone." We humans are mere creatures, bound within time, confined to one place at one time. But our God has no such restrictions. He is outside the limits of time and space, outside the limits of the laws of nature. For He existed before they did and in fact, He created them.

That is clear from the next words: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This is a description of God's first act of creation on the first day. God created first the heavens and the earth in a basic form, a rudimentary form, as yet uninhabitable. That comes out in the description in v.2, "Now the earth was formless and empty"—literally, it was "desolation and emptiness." God's initial act of creation set forth a cosmos that could as yet not be lived in – and God will go on to finish His work in the coming days and make it habitable for all creatures. But what stands out in the opening sentence of the Bible is that *creation* is something different from, apart from the Creator. The Creator exists in a class all His own!

This stands in marked contrast to how many people today think of God. Many think God is part and parcel of creation itself. You see this strongly in the environmental movement where "Mother Earth" reigns supreme. The earth and nature cannot be harmed in any way, the thinking goes, for we derive our life from the earth and we in fact stand on an equal footing with the rest of creation. The spirit of God is found within all of creation – whether it's a rock, a tree, or a chimpanzee! Many native peoples of North America still believe that animals have spirits just like humans. This is really an ancient heresy called pantheism, which teaches that God pervades all of creation as an impersonal spiritual force.

And don't think main-stream culture doesn't believe this either. Many television shows, many songs, many Walt Disney movies teach this. You see it especially when someone dies. What happens to their spirit? It doesn't go

to heaven to live in God's presence (much less to hell for punishment), but it stays around on the earth and becomes one with nature! People will then say of the deceased something like: "We see him in the birds of the air, in the clouds; we hear him rustling in the green grass, in the laughter of our children." His spirit has joined with the great spirit or god that is nature.

Look for that the next time you watch, read, or listen to popular culture. There is a strong belief that nature itself is one with God, but the Bible teaches that the Creator is separate, distinct, and above all of His creation. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

And that's a good thing too, isn't it? What purpose is there to life if all we do is live as a human today only to be joined with nature tomorrow? And what help is there in this difficult life where we battle the effects of sin also within creation itself? What help is there if nature itself *is* God?

But our God, our Maker, is *above* creation, is superior to nature. He in fact has nature in complete control so that He is more than able to help in our difficulties. Beloved, there's nothing your Creator *can't* do to help! His power is beyond measure and His glorious creation demonstrates that. Out of nothing He created all that we see and all that we don't see. That is implicit in our text, but it is confessed loud and clear in the rest of the Bible. Think of what we sang in Psalm 33:2: "He by His Word has made the heavens; / their host appeared by His decree." God spoke and creation leapt into existence. Can we even comprehend such power? Remember that your God is also your Maker. Go to Him for all your needs. For God your Creator is listening carefully.

That too comes out when you reflect upon what it is that God is doing. God created the heavens and the earth, the universe. But why? Our text does not say in so many words. Did God *need* to create the world? Was there a necessity? The answer must be "no." Nothing existed besides God and God of Himself has no need of anything. God is self-sufficient in every possible way. God is perfect and complete and has no need of anyone or anything outside of Himself.

That is not the case with us. We humans – in fact *all* creatures – are fully dependent on things outside of ourselves. We like to think we are self-sufficient but the truth is we need food, shelter, clothing. We need human companionship, love, and support. Anyone starved of these things lives in misery. Most of all we need God.

But God doesn't need us, does He? Paul states as much in Acts 17:25: "And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." God could have continued in perfect bliss and contentment if He had never created anything.

What then is the act of creation, brothers and sisters, but an act of pure grace on God's part? He created all things not for *His* benefit but for *creation's* benefit! Not to fulfill a personal desire, but rather to share Himself! To share His goodness and love with others! God set out to create so that all the works of His hands might know Him, might live under His blessing and be filled with joy in fellowshiping with God who is good, wise, perfect and filled with steadfast love. *We* exist, the *world* exists, purely by God's grace! Ponder the wonder of your Maker and His grace! When you have a need, trust your Creator to fulfill it, for that is His creative purpose.

But then you must also give the Creator your love in return – your undivided love and devotion. A lot of people have forgotten their Creator and live as if He's not there, or as if they have nothing to do with Him. Some people acknowledge that God exists, but treat God as if He is lucky to have them around! Some by their attitude or their actions hold God at arm's length and try to restrict God to a part of their lives – say, coming to church on Sunday, or going to Bible Study. But for the other parts of their lives, the Creator is shut-out. He's not allowed to come in. He's not allowed to have a say. Does that describe you, Beloved?

Don't think of your neighbour in the pew now. The Word of God comes to *you* first of all. How about it? Do you remember your Creator in all aspects of your life? God created the world. He created work, He created

relationships. Do you remember God at your workplace and inside the four walls of your home? Inside your bedroom when no one else can see, do you also there *consciously* live and act under the eye of your Maker? In your mind, with your words and with your actions, do you reckon with Almighty God – who made every atom in your body – and do all these things in submission to His will? Or are you harbouring sin in a portion of your life, convinced that no one knows of it or that no one will ever find out?

Too late. Your Creator has known all along, and it's to Him that you will have to render account. Now is the time to confess that sin and repent, for as Ecclesiastes 11:9 says: "Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment." God didn't create this world so that it could despise Him or keep Him at bay. A day of judgment is coming. Are you ready? Submit to your Creator and live joyfully in His creation.

## The creation

For that is also something clearly taught in our text, and indeed through the whole chapter: all of creation comes from God's hand. All of creation, therefore, is connected to and related to God. Even more, all of creation is under God's authority, His rule. You cannot cut up life into different slices like an apple pie and say: "that part is for you God, but this is for me," or "this is for others."

And yet this is done by so many. Religion, people say, is merely someone's personal beliefs. Simply a *part* of their life. It's something you do a few times a week, a certain number of hours a month, and at special times of the year, but *there's more to life than religion*. When Mr. Paul Martin was Prime Minister of Canada he claimed to be a religious man, a devout Roman Catholic, but at the same time insisted that his religion may not dictate what he does as Prime Minister. It's on that basis that he refused to denounce homosexuality and felt free to pursue legislation to fully

legalize gay marriage in Canada. He parked his faith at the doorstep of Parliament Hill and then did his work as PM. Mr. Martin had carved up his life. He relegated God to Sundays, but kept Him out of the picture Monday to Saturday.

But God can't be kept out of the picture Monday to Saturday – God made each of those days too! And for those who take the whole Bible seriously in faith and understand what the Creator has done, for us who believe, brothers and sisters, *all of life is religion!* All that we see and experience, all that we think and do, all our relationships, all our education, all our adventures, all our days, they all relate to God. All of it falls under the authority of our Creator, and nothing can be understood or experienced apart from the One who called it into existence!

This is what we call a “world-view” – how you understand the universe and all that takes place in it. As Christians, as Reformed people who stand on the Bible as God's infallible Word, we understand the whole world to be in God's hands. Whatever God has created of itself is good and to be enjoyed by us, God's creatures. The world is not divided into religious things and non-religious things, but all of life pertains to our faith.

When farmers plant their fields in spring, they sow the seed under God's command and pray for God's blessing. Whether you are a salesman, a carpenter, a printer, a student, a mechanic, a secretary, a teacher, an architect, a janitor, a minister or a stay-at-home mom, each lawful vocation is a calling from God to labour within His creation. None is more holy than the other, but all must be done out of faith to the glory of our Creator. Whatever our hand finds to do, we must do it with all our might. Life has meaning only when we connect it to our Creator and live it under His authority.

I want to return to the area of government and politics for a moment. We get our information about our government and the political leaders of this world from a largely secular media, none of whom mentions the role of

God in government. Over time, I think we have become used to thinking like the world – as if what is done in the provincial legislature or in Ottawa or in Washington, DC, has little or nothing to do with what we're doing here in church! But brothers and sisters, also the governing authorities of our land and our world will have to answer to God! And it's our job to make them aware of that, and call them to account for their actions and decisions. If we Christians don't speak out to our elected leaders about the godlessness of their decision-making, we share in their guilt and serve the cause of darkness.

Let's not think that government is outside of our concern. I understand that on occasion in various places church members have participated in local municipal government over the years – if so, excellent! God's Name is being exalted in the local town hall! But let's not stop there. Let's allow our knowledge of God as Creator to energize us also to work for His glory in the provincial and federal realm!

And we can do that all the more earnestly and all the more effectively because our Creator is more than the God who *made* us: He's also the God who *saves* us. For the truth is, we've ruined the Creator's good creation with our sin. We insulted and offended God with our choice to disobey His command and because of that, sin has corrupted the heavens and the earth.

And yet our Creator has not abandoned us and destroyed us, as was His right to do. For our Creator is not just God the Father, but also God the Son. As we read from John 1:1:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.

Our text does not mention His Name, but God's Son was clearly present and deeply involved in the Father's creative work.



And ever since our fall, the Son has been deeply involved in the Father's *re-creative* work, because the Word of God came into the world to bring life. The world He helped create is the world He has come to save. Where man has failed and made this world a dark place to live, the Son has succeeded and pierced through the blackness. As John writes, "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it." John uses the creation vocabulary of Genesis 1 to write about God's new creation in Jesus Christ, His Son.

Beloved, the Father *created* this world through His Son, and now He has *redeemed* this world through His Son. That makes this world worth our time and effort, doesn't it? Sin is here and we must struggle against it, but sin has been overcome in Christ and will be removed from this creation on His great day. You can live and work under that blessing, under that hope and expectation. Life is worth living because it has been saved from futility through the cross of Jesus. And we may live and work with the aid of our ever-caring God.

## The care

Verse 2 may seem rather obscure: "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." It's hard to know what to make of this at first, but notice how the Holy Spirit is mentioned here. Father, Son and Spirit are all equally involved in the great work of creation.

The Spirit is described as "hovering over the waters." Now, that verb "hovering" is as close as we're going to get in English to the Hebrew word, but there's a nuance we need to understand well. That verb is rather rare and is used only two other times in the Old Testament, most notably in Deuteronomy 32:11 where it is used to refer to the action of a mother eagle "hovering over its young."

You see, a mama eagle has to teach the little eagle babies to fly. To do that, she will nudge them out of the warm nest with her beak so that they tumble headlong to the ground. As they fall, they will instinctively begin to flap their wings and learn to fly. But if anything should go wrong, if the eaglet doesn't quite get it or if there's any danger, then mama is prepared to swoop down and catch the baby bird up on her wings and take him back to safety. That's why she *hovers*. The hovering of the mama eagle is motivated by deep concern and care for her young.

Well then, the Holy Spirit in His hovering over the waters is not just idling there like some hover-craft, but He is actively caring for the creation! He is watching over it, even upholding it so that nothing falls apart. And now look at what the Spirit cares so much for: an earth which was, "formless and empty," covered in darkness! If the Holy Spirit cares so much for an unformed world, where there is no life whatsoever, a world that as yet is uninhabitable, how much more do you think He cares for this world that is full of life created by God? And how much more do you think He cares for you, a child redeemed by the Son and chosen for everlasting life?

Meet your Maker: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There's no one like Him in power, in grace, and in love. He's given Himself to you. Won't you give yourself to Him?

AMEN!

## IN SIX DAYS

*And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day...  
 God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.  
 And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.*

— *Genesis 1:5,31*



Today, we move on from the initial creation of the universe in its unformed state to the further creative activity of God. God has created a wonderful thing in the heavens and the earth. Do we not often stand back in amazement at what we behold in creation? Even still now after sin has corrupted it? Think of the glorious prairie sunsets we see so often. Magnificent to behold! Every now and then we are treated to a spectacular view of the northern lights, and such sights make us exclaim: “*Wow, what beauty!*” Add to that the fields full of golden wheat, the rushing waters of the Red River or the gentle meandering flow of the Boyne River and we often have cause to reflect on the wonder of creation.

But let’s not stop there. For the wonder of creation must lead us to stand in awe of the Creator. As we have it in our text, the revelation of God’s creative work tells the story not so much of *creation’s* splendour (though that is there too) but of the *Creator’s* wisdom and power and majesty.

I proclaim to you this Word of God:

*In six days God created the heavens and the earth.*

**We see the:**

**1. Magnificent method**

**2. Mysterious manner**

**3. Marvellous wonder**

## Magnificent method

Our text begins with a simple command: “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” It immediately shows God’s absolute power and control. God voices His will and no sooner has He done so then the thing He commands takes place. The thing He willed to happen, happens – instantly, without hesitation! *Let there be light and there was light – bang!*

But we may ask: “Why light?” It is God’s first act after making the unformed mass of the earth, so why light? In fact, why not finish off the earth in one mighty creative act? “Let the earth and the heavens be completed in perfection.” Did God have to create the earth and all therein in stages? We must immediately answer “no” to that question. For the same God who could create the basic mass of the earth in an instant, and the same God who can call light into existence could also quite easily have called the finished product into existence. He *could* have made it straight away with all the plants, trees, creatures, and man in place. Lack of ability is not an issue for the Creator. Instead, we read over and over again in our text: “And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day...the second day...the third day.” God, in His wisdom, deliberately chose to create the world in *six* days.

Now, before we go further we need to say something about these days. There’s been a lot of talk about them, maybe a little too much talk. It’s

helpful to know that up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was very little disagreement over the meaning of these days. Most everyone understood them to be days of the same length as we know them today, with a sunrise and a sunset, a morning and an evening. Serious dispute only arose when philosophy and science combined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to question the historical accuracy of the Bible in general and Genesis in particular.

The real push came when Charles Darwin proposed the theory of evolution which states that all of life developed by chance from a microscopic amoeba over the course of billions of years. This is where the philosophy comes in, for Darwinism or Evolutionism is not hard fact but scientific theory that starts with the premise that God does not exist. Even today the Big Bang Theory remains just that – a *theory* with unprovable tenets. You see, evolution is just as much a matter of belief and faith as creation is.

In our day, even in Reformed circles, there are serious-minded Christians who don’t want to deny God’s existence but yet see in Genesis 1 the possibility to include some of the processes of evolution. Some of them look at Genesis 1 not as a *literal*, historical account, but as a *literary*, poetic account. The close parallels between the first group of three days and the second group of three days make them think it’s fictional not factual, a device God used to let us know that He is responsible for creation in general.

They see it as a story which gives us the basic gist of God’s creative work, but not the precise details. Genesis 1 does not teach any chronology of creation, they say. Thus the six days mentioned in the text could be metaphorical for six ages or periods of time. Such an interpretation would allow for the long periods of time required for the development of the world as supposedly “discovered” by evolutionary scientists and geologists.

It’s important to understand that the pressures of science have led some to re-evaluate the long standing exegesis of Genesis 1 and that should already raise red flags in our mind. The scientific theories of man must never guide the understanding of the Bible, but just the other way around!

Science is *man's quest* for knowledge, a fallible quest whose theories are constantly being revised. But the Bible is *God's revelation* of knowledge, an infallible fountain of truth that cannot be altered.

Brothers and sisters, if you simply and honestly read Genesis 1 whether in Hebrew or in plain English what is unmistakable is its straight talk. This is not fanciful poetry and metaphor; this is not symbolism or allegory but a simple, even sober explanation of what God did in creating the heavens and the earth. When a child reads Genesis 1 and hears the constant refrain: "And there was evening and there was morning, the first day, the second day," what does he think? He thinks of a regular, average day. And that's precisely what it means! There is no indication anywhere in Genesis 1 or 2 or following that the days of creation are anything other than *days of ordinary length!* In fact, this truth is even emphasized by Moses when he takes the time to spell out that each day had an evening and a morning! What more could Moses have said to make it clear that the length of these days was the same as the days Israel knew and which we still know today?

Later, the LORD Himself reinforces this understanding in the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment as we hear it every Sunday morning:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God....For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

If the days of creation are not six literal days, then God's own given reason for setting aside the seventh day as the day of rest falls apart! The parallel would be meaningless! So the only and simple conclusion we can come to is this: God created the heavens and the earth in the span of six days of ordinary length: not five days, not eight days, but *six* days!

And look at the order of His work within those six days: first we have light. Light is one of the most fundamental requirements for life on this earth.

It gives off heat. With its unique properties, light serves to provide a basic necessity for all of life. Here we can see a pattern developing. The LORD God begins with the very foundation and works His way to the pinnacle of creation. From an empty and desolate heavens and earth that could not in that condition sustain life, God moves forward, adding elements and arranging the elements so that finally life can survive! First plant life, then animal life and in the end the last thing God creates is human life, the only creature in His own image, and thus the highest life form in all His creation! But in order for man to live and function, he needs all that came before him.

So, there is a building and a gathering momentum in God's work. From the creation of light and the alternation between light and darkness, the LORD moves to separate and distinguish the sky from the earth. That's what is meant in v.6, "Let there be an expanse to separate water from water." Clouds would hold water in the sky and the oceans would hold water on the earth. That's harmony and structure. On the third day the waters on the earth are then gathered into one place so that dry land could appear. You can see Him preparing the earth as a habitation for life. There's a leading-up to something, for on that dry land also appears vegetation: grass and flowers, seed-bearing plants and fruit bearing trees. And who will eat the fruit or make use of the plants and the grass? Is it not the animals and man which God creates on Day 6?

It's good to remember that too, especially in the spring time – the planting of the field is part of God's creation set-up. Farming, just as every legitimate occupation, is a religious endeavour for you are participating in God's handiwork. We'll speak more about man's role next time, the Lord willing, but when you are sitting on your tractor for hour after hour cultivating and disking and hopefully planting your fields, remember that you are doing the Lord's work too.

And for those of us who merely observe the planting process, let us not take it for granted that the plants will grow. Or that the grocery stores will

be filled without interruption. Nothing happens automatically or of its own power. Wheat doesn't grow "naturally," as the world says. Wheat grows by divine power. God created the seed-bearing plants and God upholds their ability to reproduce by His providence. If God were to ever hold back the blessing of growth, we would be in an instant famine. Remember Joseph in Egypt. That's why we have a prayer service for crops and labour each spring.

God displays a magnificent method in His creative process. Do you see its wisdom and its internal harmony? I'd like you also to notice how the six creation days follow a distinct pattern. You can see two parallel groups of three. On day one God creates light and on day four He creates the light *bearers*: the sun, moon, and stars. On day two God separates earth from sky, waters below from waters above and on day five God fills the sky with birds and the oceans with fish. On day three God causes land to appear and brings forth vegetation, plants and trees and on day six God creates the land animals and finally man himself. Everything corresponds with each other. There is a perfect symmetry in God's stunning creation!

And why should this wonderful pattern be unhistorical? Why can't *literary* parallels be a description of *factual* parallels? As if God can't be both symmetrical and historical! Brothers and sisters, if God has the wisdom and the power to create something out of nothing, what is to prevent Him from arranging His work in distinct parallels and to model for us the beauty of symmetry?

Our God is abundantly wise and powerful and He shows us also that He is a God of order, not chaos. Things fit together in creation because God made them fit. Things click together because God made them click. You know, that's really the basis of all scientific investigation. Ironically, most scientists see the order in creation as evidence that God does *not* exist, but it's actually proof that He does, isn't it? Why should biology or geology or mathematics or any of the sciences actually *work* unless there is a Great Designer who gave everything its place and station, who established order in all of creation?

God has a plan and a time-table for His creation. That's something we also need to learn again and again. Sometimes we want God to work a little faster, don't we? We have a problem in our life or we see such misery in the world and we can think, "Lord, why don't you put an end to it now? Why don't you send your Son on the clouds?" Life is not always easy, as we sang in Psalm 102:3:

While I lie awake in sorrow,  
I am like a lonely sparrow  
Perching on the housetop high.  
Like the pelican am I  
and the owl; in desolation.

Life can grind a person down. And in it all we are naturally impatient people who often want immediate resolution to situations. But our Creator does not work on *our* schedule. He works on His own schedule – and we need to entrust ourselves into His hands. Life may seem to be out of control, but God remains firmly in control. All may appear to be lost and without hope, but God knows exactly what is happening and how it will turn out. Just look at creation round about you: our God is a *planner* who has a purpose for everything. That's what the Psalmist did in Psalm 102. In the midst of his adversity he looked around himself and through creation found comfort in the Creator, as we will sing (stanza 11):

Like a cloak, Thy whole creation  
From the skies to earth's foundation  
Thou dost change; it fades away  
But Thou art the same for aye.  
LORD, the children of Thy servants  
All the line of their descendants  
Shall in safety dwell before Thee  
For Thy steadfast love adore Thee

From creation He reflected on the One who made it all and concluded that all is well in the hands of this God. We can and we must give ourselves over to our unfathomable God.

## Mysterious manner

For let's not pretend that we know all there is to know about God. Our text lays bare certain mysteries about God. We see that in the manner of His creative work. Moses writes very simply, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

Can you understand that, brothers and sisters? Does it not boggle the mind? Everything man does or makes, he does or makes with *existing* materials. If children wish to make a tower, they will get out their *Lego* blocks and build one. If men wish to make a tower, they will get out their re-bar, their concrete trucks, their cranes, and all sorts of things and build one. If someone wishes to write a book or paint a picture, they take pen or brush in hand, along with ink and dyes. If your mother wants to bake a cake, then she takes the pan in the cupboard, mixes in the flour, sugar, cocoa powder and all the other ingredients, puts it in the oven, and '*presto*,' the cake is made. But no one can simply say, "Let there be a building" and from out of nowhere, from no existing substance, a building suddenly comes into existence! We can't do that. We can't even grasp that. And yet that's God's way: *let there be light!*

There is mysterious, incomprehensible power at work in God, Beloved. Isn't that a comforting thing? Imagine that we could understand God's working, God's power. Imagine that His manner of creating was familiar to us – wouldn't that make us equal to God? If we could figure God out, so to speak, if we could analyze all His powers and abilities like we dissect things in biology class, would we not have a very small God? A limited God? Such a God would be no more able than we are to help us in this life of sorrow. But our God is *not* comprehensible! Rejoice, Beloved, that we can't figure God out for in His mysterious power He is able to do far more than we ever can imagine! All He has to do is *will it*, and it comes to pass!

It's good to remember that when we deal with difficult situations. I think now of people we know, people we love who do not believe in God,

who do not have faith in Christ – maybe even people who have left the path, like we've all seen from time to time. We want these people to see who God really is, to join us in worshipping Him. But no matter how hard we try to explain it, no matter how passionate we are in trying to convince them of it, they hold themselves back. We get nowhere. It's easy to then feel deflated, discouraged, or even hopeless. *How will I ever get through to him? It seems like "mission impossible."* But not so for the God who calls things which are not into existence! We may never get through, but God's mighty Word can smash through the hardest heart, can melt the toughest core, and create inside that person a new heart. He did it for you, didn't He? Don't give up hope, but pray all the more fervently for a break-through of God's Word.

For God's Word at creation is much more than vocalized sound going forth from God's mouth. Remember what John says in chapter 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word... and through Him all things were made." When we see God speaking in Genesis 1 we must understand that the Father spoke His will through His Son and then the Spirit brought things into existence! The same Son who today is the Lord Jesus Christ was then the Father's mode or vehicle to command all of creation into existence. This Word has inherent power! And it is this Word which we proclaim through the power of the Holy Spirit.

You know, there's another amazing parallel here too. Father and Son sent out the Spirit in the beginning to watch over and energize creation – to make it happen, you could say. At Pentecost, the Father and Son sent the Spirit out again to watch over and energize the new creation in Christ – to make *it* happen! The Word of God is busy creating once again, creating a new people out of an old fallen world. Take hope, brothers and sisters! The God who made light pierce the darkness of a formless world has also pierced the darkness of this sinful world and is taking us to the day when that darkness will be no more!

For maybe you noticed another mystery in these creative acts – light is created on the *first* day, but the sun, moon, and stars on the *fourth* day. This seems very strange, even impossible at first, and many people cite this as a reason for disbelieving the historicity of Genesis 1. We know our light comes from the sun, so how can light exist on the first day but not yet the sun?

But is it really impossible for a God who creates something from nothing to have a *different* source of light than the sun, moon, and stars for a time? Could God not have an alternative source of light and then simply create new light sources to mark off time and seasons? Can we not see in this separation of light from light bearers something of the marvellous wonder of God’s work?

### Marvellous wonder

I’d like you turn with me a moment to Revelation 22. You know, it’s amazing how much the end of the Bible resembles the beginning. I’d like you to look at v.4, where the situation in the new Jerusalem on the new heaven and earth is described. There we read: “They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.” Do you see that? There will be no more night! They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light – *God Himself* will be the source of light!

Man has always thought highly of the sun. Science today tells us that without the sun’s light and heat, life on this earth would not be possible. We all love it when the sun comes out to warm up the air and the earth, don’t we? The farmers count on it too for their crops. Corn and wheat need so many light hours and heat units in order to grow to maturity, right? The sun has long been hailed as the basic staple of life, so much so that many ancient cultures worshipped the sun. Think of the Egyptians and their sun god Ra.

But God in His Word subtly but unmistakably tells us that the sun is merely a servant, a temporary holder of the light. First He created *light*, then days later, the *sun*. The sun is not the be-all, end-all – *God* is the be-all, end-all! And when the time for the sun’s service is completed, God’s own light will shine upon us for all eternity!

Do we not have an amazing Creator? You can see His unique creative genius in all of creation. Many of you love to work in your gardens and some will work in the fields or the greenhouses. Make sure you stop a minute and smell the flowers. Look them over and see their intricate and delicate design, their multi-variegated varieties and patterns, their many shades of colour. And have you ever noticed that no matter how different the plant colours, they never clash with each other? Even after thousands of years of investigation of this present creation, we still are wonder-struck at how it all fits and works together.

Won’t we then also be wonder-struck at the new creation, the new heaven and the new earth? Sometimes we get a little concerned, a little antsy about how that new life is going to be. Will the things we love here be present there also? Will the things we love doing here be part of life there? Especially those who have lost spouses to death, knowing that there is no marriage in the next life can be very unsettling.

But here too, we have every reason to trust in our Creator-Father – has He let us down with the first creation? Even in its broken state we often have much joy and satisfaction. How much more, then, in the new creation! If this present earth makes our jaw drop in reverent wonder, will the next earth not do so even more? If God has given the beautiful gift of marriage in this life, do you think He can’t give something still *more* beautiful in the next life, something we aren’t even capable of imagining today? If God gave His one and only Son to redeem this world and make a new start, do you think the new earth will pale in comparison to the present earth in any respect?

God our creator is wise and His works are already marvellous beyond our comprehension. Wait then, for the new creation with a firm hope and eager expectation. You won't be disappointed.

AMEN!

## MEET YOURSELF

*Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

– Genesis 1:26-27



**D**o you know who you are? This may seem like a strange question but there are many people today who really don't know who they are. It's quite common for people to grow up doing the things their parents did before them, following a similar pattern in life – get an education, get a job, get married, have children – only to wake up one day wondering what life is all about.

For some, the question comes when they turn forty or so, in what psychologists call a "mid-life crisis." They see their life shaping-up much the same as the generation before it. They see its cyclical nature, a pattern with no end: birth, life, death; birth, life, death and on and on. That realization can leave them shaken to the core. *What is my life, really? Just another cog in the wheel? Just another drop in the ocean? Just another brick in the wall?*



But it can happen to young people just as well. Teenagers or young adults who observe life and reflect on it with the question: “Why? Why am I here and who am I in this vast, vast world?” The question is posed in many pop songs, in many articles and books, by philosophers, poets and the common man alike: *do you know who you are?* When people simply live life “just because,” sooner or later they will face a crisis of identity – *who am I?*

This can also happen to people who grow up in a Christian family. Sometimes children grow up and live the pattern of the Christian life just like their parents did before them, but they haven’t understood why. They follow in the footsteps of their mom and dad, they have the outward shell of faith, but it doesn’t have meaning for them. They’re just doing what they’ve been taught until one day it hits them smack in the face: *What am I living for? Who am I and why am I on this planet?*

These are vital, life-shaking and life-shaping questions, questions for which our text provides answers. Where philosophy and rock ‘n roll and psychology only grasp at straws, the Word of God tells us exactly who we are: we are the image of God.

I proclaim to you this Word of God:

***You were created in the image of God***

**Thus:**

**1. Represent God in the world**

**2. Reflect God to the world**

## **Represent God in the world**

The LORD God in His creative work has been building to a climax. We saw something of that already when we took note of His work pattern. First the foundation of the created order is laid, that unformed mass. Then everything is arranged and ordered within the great heavens and the earth

in order to provide the necessary environment for God’s last act of creation – mankind. Man is the pinnacle of God’s handiwork. First the fish in the sea and birds in the air, then the crawling things, cattle and wild animals of the earth, and finally man. Man is the crown of God’s creation.

Now we should recognize here that the theory of evolution also understands this same basic order and hierarchy in nature. Evolutionists have observed the facts of God’s creation and indeed see that man is the highest of all creatures. It is well known that only man can reason with his mind, only man has advanced language and communication skills, only man can invent technology and develop it, and only man walks fully upright. “Man is at the top,” they say.

But that’s where the similarity ends, for evolutionists go on to explain that man got to his top position by a lengthy process of subtle change and advancement over billions of years. Man evolved from the same ancestor as apes and monkeys, they say. And this ancient beast itself evolved from a lower animal form. Maybe a proto-type of a chicken, but it’s anyone’s guess. And such birds evolved from something lower and more basic than themselves, until at the very root of all life stands the microscopic amoeba that lives in the bottom of the ocean. The evolutionist believes, without a shred of hard evidence, that all of life, man included, came forth from and evolved from that tiniest beginning of life in the ocean.

This theory has many implications for the life of human beings. In the first place, we’re just one of the animals. Perhaps more accurately, we are one *with* the animals. We’re not inherently different than the creatures. We are just further along on the scale of evolution. Deep down we’re all the same because we all have the same parent: that amoeba in the sea!

This is taught everywhere in our society, especially on children’s shows – think of *Zaboomafoo*. It’s a nice show in many respects. You can learn a lot about animals, but its operating principle is evolutionistic to the core. The closing song says it all, “This animal is a friend of mine, from the tip of his

nose to his funny behind... we've all got different names, but we're really all the same." Human life, then, is on par with animal life. It has no more value or meaning than animal life. Just like the animals, we live today, die tomorrow and that's the end of it.

This belief about man leads to a radical change in ethics as well, for evolution operates on the principle of, "survival of the fittest." Weak members of a species naturally die off but the strong ones survive, mostly at the expense of the weak. The strong go on to evolve into higher life forms. So, in order for man to keep advancing, the weak and the helpless ought to be left to their own devices and the strong must make progress. Evolution turns society into a dog-eat-dog world where no one cares for the other but each looks to survive and triumph over the other. Such thinking encourages individualism, a "me-first" society, and along with it makes room for such weeding out of the weak and unwanted through such tools as genetic engineering, abortion and euthanasia – *only the strong survive*. What do you think Hitler was doing in killing Jews, Gypsies and the handicapped?

With that cold, hard view of mankind and his origins, it's no wonder many ask: *Who am I? And what on earth am I living for? If all life is about is survival, if all it comes down to is 'dog-eat-dog,' why should I bother struggling through it? What's the point? The purpose? I might as well end it right now and save myself a lifetime of grief and meaninglessness.* Have you ever wondered why suicide rates are on the rise in North America and in the world at large?<sup>9</sup> Evolutionism devalues human life to that of an ordinary animal and gives no rhyme or reason for living at all.

But the gospel of God's creation tells us that human life is something different than the animals, something unique! The opening words of our text jump off the page, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...'" Notice first how man's creation is pointedly marked off from that of all other things. For all other creative acts we read simply: "And God said, 'Let there be light...'" or, "Let the water teem with living

creatures..." or, "Let the land produce living creatures." For everything else there is a simple will and command from above, but for God's last work there is first a careful deliberation and divine consultation, "Let us make man..." Man is not made by chance; man is not an add-on to the animal kingdom but he is given special consideration by the Almighty God.

For who is referred to here in the "us?" That too is very striking. Everywhere else in the chapter we read only of the singular "God" who creates all things, but suddenly when man is about to be formed then we read about the plural "Let *us* make man." Not too long ago I had Jehovah's Witnesses at the door and you know that they don't believe in the Trinity. When I mentioned this verse, the lady explained that it referred to the angels – God was consulting with the angels. But brothers and sisters, since when does God consult with the angels before creating something? God needs no counsellors! And the iron-clad proof that God refers here in the plural to Himself is the simple fact that man is made only in the image of God, *not* in the image of angels! The LORD highlights that in v.27 of our text, "So God created man in His own image, in the image *of God* He created him." There can be no doubt about it! God here speaks of *Himself* in the plural which means that the creation of the world and then especially of man was a work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

We usually associate creation with the work of the Father – which is true – and yet it's never the Father operating in isolation from the Son and Spirit! There is always close cooperation and mutual assistance. It's even so that behind the scenes in God's design, so to speak, the creation of man is modelled after the person of the Son. We read about that in Colossians 1:15. Paul exalts the Son exclaiming,

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

<sup>9</sup> This information taken from: <http://www.mental-health-matters.com/articles/article>.

Do you see that? *Through the Son* all things were made. Everything in creation hangs together because of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ! But even more amazing is that Christ the Son is called here the “image of the invisible God.” Think about that. The eternal Son of God is the image of the Father *par excellence!* He is Himself God and shares in God’s essence, and when the Father created man, when the Father created you, He formed you in the image of Himself by forming you in the image of His Son! Sometimes we think of God the Son as coming into the picture only after the fall into sin as our Saviour, but we need to understand that Adam and indeed all men are *made* in the image of the Son!

That makes you worth something. In fact, it makes you invaluable. You’re no animal, you’re no monkey. This fact alone marks you off as something different from the beasts, something of high importance. Do you think the LORD would form you in the image of His Son and then not care about you? Whatever else it may mean to be made in God’s image, it speaks of a very high position and is proof of the great significance and importance God places on you – He made you in *His* image!

And not only you, but *all* of humanity, for the LORD is inclusive: “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them.” Not only men but also women are created in the image of God. Men and women have different roles, to be sure, but let it be understood right now that one is not more valuable than the other, one is not closer to God than the other, one is not superior to the other but men and women are equally precious to the LORD for He made *both* in His own image.

And not only believers either. Part of being *human* is being created in God’s image. The LORD emphasized that in Genesis 9 when He commanded Noah after the flood: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the *image* of God has God made man.” Even after man fell into sin, even after man corrupted the image of God that

he is, even in his total depravity, even then the LORD still recognizes the remnant of His image in man.

This is a good starting point in our evangelism efforts. A lot of people live as if they have nothing to do with God. They couldn’t care less about Him. They think they have no business with God. And because of this attitude and the wickedness of people in general we often conclude that God has little to do with them, that He doesn’t care about them. But nothing could be further from the truth! God created them too! God made also *them* in His image and demands of them too that they live up to their created calling!

When we speak to people about God we could ask them: “Do you know that God created you in His own image? Do you know that God set you apart to live for His glory? Do you know that God sends the rain and sun to grow the food you eat? That He is providing all your needs so that you can live as His image?” People think that they have nothing to do with God, but their very existence and survival is proof that they have everything to do with their Creator – and it’s our job to tell them about that! Let’s call them to be the image of God they were created to be!

But what does that mean, to be created in God’s image? We know it’s a very high honour, but what is it exactly? Well, remarkably, the LORD does not define it in so many words in our text, and that has led to great debate. Some have thought that it means we look like God physically, but that can’t be since God has no body. Others have thought it refers to man’s rational ability, to his capacity to reason, speak, and even to his will and soul.

Certainly these things are part of the picture, but our text gives us specific information in v.26. Immediately after God determines to make man in His own image, in the very same breath He gives him a task, “Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and

over all the creatures that move along the ground.” The image of God in man is tied directly to the *task* of man in creation, namely to rule over it. In other words, mankind is to *represent* God to the world as king over creation.

Think of it this way. God is Supreme Ruler, Creator and King over all the universe. He is the highest King simply because of who He is: God Almighty, the One who has the power to call things into existence that were not. No one even compares to God, no one ever will and so He always was, is, and forever will be King of all Creation.

But now God the King arranges His creation in such a way that He places man as a steward over it *on His behalf!* We are like sub-rulers, second only to God Himself, put in charge of the universe to care for it, tend it. In short, to rule over it just like God Himself would. We have the high calling to represent God to the world as vice-regents – kind of like how the Governor General of Canada represents the Queen to us.

Being the image of God is, at least in part, *representing God* to the world as kings and queens over creation. How well are you doing that task, brothers and sisters? Another time we hope to speak more about what it means to rule over creation, but as you live your life, as you conduct yourself in the place and station God has put you, do people see the image of God in you? Do people notice that you have the same concern and care for God’s creation as He Himself does? Do you treat other people with respect as fellow image-bearers, believers and non-believers alike?

Sometimes we treat our jobs as just another way to make money, just another way to pay the bills, but is that how God’s representative should think of his daily work? You’re not just on this planet by yourself or for yourself; you’re not just “getting by” in this life and then you die. No, you live as the *image of God*, as a royal king or queen created by God to look after this earth, to cultivate this earth for His honour. It’s not about your pleasure, but it’s about God’s glory! And the wonderful thing is that when you focus your life on bringing God glory as His representative, you will have all

kinds of pleasure and joy too, for that’s what humans were made for!

And in our representing God we at the same time will necessarily reflect God to the world.

## Reflect God to the world

For the image of God involves more than the task of ruling. It’s also *how* we rule, *how* we live on this earth. Later in Colossians 3:9 the Apostle Paul writes, “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” Being the image of God means living according to a certain code of conduct. Image bearers don’t lie, for example.

Elsewhere, in Ephesians 4:22, Paul expands on this:

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Being God’s image means being like God in true righteousness and holiness. It means doing our royal task in full obedience to God’s law, in complete harmony with His will, and without one spot of sin or evil. Are you able to do that? That’s a pretty tall order, isn’t it?

Now that’s where Pentecost and the Holy Spirit comes in! For what is the Holy Spirit doing inside of us if it is not precisely restoring the image of God in us? For the reality is that though man was made in the image of God, man has ruined the image of God. We’ve corrupted it, big-time. You could say that man was created as a mirror of God, to reflect His righteousness and holiness as he ruled over creation, but when man rebelled against God it was like that mirror fractured into a million pieces. The mirror is still there, but it’s unable to do its job – it can no longer show to the world God’s goodness and sinlessness. There are at best only faint

glimmerings of God's image left in natural man. The image of the Son was for all intents and purposes destroyed in man.

But then came the Son, sent by the Father to resurrect in us what we had killed! For listen to what Paul writes in Romans 8:3, "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." Isn't that something? The Son was made in *our* likeness, *our* image! In the beginning man was created in perfection after the image of God the Son, but when man had corrupted that image, the perfect Son was then made in the image of sinful man! Even to be a *sin offering* for us!

Think of God's love here, Beloved. He humiliated His sinless Son by clothing Him with a weak and susceptible human nature. Though He was no sinner, He took on human flesh that in every way felt the consequences of Adam's sin. A body that could feel pain, that could grow tired, that could be exhausted, that could be misunderstood, that could suffer, be beaten, be insulted – that could even die! God the Son was made in our image, took upon Himself our due curse for sin so that we might be re-created in the image of God!

And on the day of Pentecost, the Son sent down His Spirit to start that work in earnest. The Spirit is here to bring us back to Paradise, back to where we started and even further, to become now like Christ! Having known the horror of sin and its misery we are being restored to righteousness and holiness as heirs together with Christ. Paul sums it up in v.15, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" By Him, by the Spirit at work in us we call upon God as Father on the basis of the blood of Christ.

Christ's Spirit makes us able again to reflect the true image of God – we *can* make a start on it now. That's why He can give those commands in Colossians 3 and Ephesians 4: "Put off your old self, put on your new self,

created to be like God." Are you doing that, brothers and sisters? There's an old nature, that shattered mirror that shows nothing of God, and there's a new nature, the image of Christ which shows to the world what God is like and who God is – righteous and holy. There are two images and only two images. Which image are you showing to the world?

When you walk through town, when you hang out with your friends, when you conduct your business, when you shop at the grocery store, who do people see? A child of God or a child of the devil? When you're at the skate-board park or driving around in your car or sitting in the class-room, who are you? Just another human who doesn't know God, doesn't understand God, doesn't have faith in God? Or are you trying to be your heavenly Father's son? Or daughter?

The Apostle is blunt about the distinction in v.5, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires." On what is your mind set? Do you know who you are? As a human you are created in God's image and as a covenant child you have the promise of being re-created in God's image by the power of the Spirit. Are you grabbing hold of that promise in faith? Do you keep in step with the Spirit of Pentecost?

The world wonders what life is all about. God tells us straight-up: *life is about being My image in this world*. There's no need for an identity crisis. God created you in His likeness. God through Christ is re-creating you in His likeness. *That's* your identity. That's who you are – now live it!

AMEN!

## KINGS & QUEENS

*God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

– Genesis 1:28



Last time we dealt with what it means to be created in the image of God. As God’s image in this world we are called to reflect God to the world, to be like a mirror so that when people look at us, when they observe us living out our life, they see something of God’s righteousness and holiness. That’s a pretty overwhelming task, even a bit scary. For who is able to shine forth the righteous character of God? No one is able naturally, for we are all sinful people. And yet the good news of Jesus Christ is that through His blood, and by the power of His Holy Spirit, we can make a start on it! The children of God will be different than the rest, for in them the image of God is being restored by Christ’s blood and Spirit.

Still, there is more to being God’s image. It also involves representing God in creation as His vice-regent, as His appointed king over creation. The LORD speaks of this task in the same breath as He speaks of His image, v.26, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over

the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” Man the image-bearer is made ruler over all living creatures, indeed, over all creation.

We’ve got to rule over this earth, but what does that mean? None of us are kings, descended from royalty, with blue blood flowing through our veins. We’re simple people, trying to make a living each day. So how are we as farmers, technicians, mechanics, mothers, fathers, students, teachers, salesmen and administrators, to have dominion over creation?

I proclaim to you this Word of God,

### ***God created man to have dominion over the earth***

#### **We do this through:**

- 1. Our work**
- 2. Our marriages**

### **Our work**

Our text has a number of commands for mankind, and the LORD uses some specific and very telling verbs: “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it.” The earth needs to be *subdued*. And the animals need to be “ruled over,” says the LORD. The Creator is telling man that action is required on his part, that he has a responsibility in and over all creation: *subdue* the earth and *rule* over the animals. In other words, brothers and sisters, the LORD put Adam and Eve to work, and you and I along with them.

A lot of people may be surprised by this. Many people see work and labour as a curse and only wish they could live in the Garden of Eden. Didn’t God create a *paradise* for Adam and Eve? Wasn’t the Garden of Eden a place to enjoy leisure time, tranquility and serenity? In popular culture, people have the idea that Adam and Eve had it made in the shade. They had

all they needed at their disposal and so they lounged about each day in perfect bliss. But Beloved, make no mistake about it, Adam and Eve were busy *working* in that garden!

We read about that in Genesis 2:15, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to *work* it and take care of it.” Paradise is not like a vacation on the beaches of Mexico, nor is it lounging by the pool in Florida or spending your day out on the links trying to lower your golf score. Paradise itself needed tending! Way before sin ever entered this world, man was created to *work*.

In fact, work itself is a *blessing* from God. Have you ever thought of it that way? Notice how our text begins, “God blessed them and said to them...” Work is part of God’s blessing over man, just as much as having children is! And that applies to life after the fall into sin just as well as before it. Our God-given task of having dominion over the earth remains in place after the fall and so also today, as Psalm 8 says (Stanza 4, Book of Praise): “Yet, little less than God – so hast Thou made him / And Thou with glorious honour hast arrayed him, / That over Thy creation he might reign / Thou hast assigned all things as man’s domain.” Man has surely ruined the harmony of the original creation order, and by his sin has corrupted the goodness of God’s work. But the order and basic structure of that creation still stands – man is given dominion over all the earth.

And that earth must be *subdued* says our text. This is a striking word for the LORD to use, for in every other instance in Scripture this verb has a negative connotation. It often has to do with one person putting another person under his thumb, so to speak, usually by force. Nations are subdued, enemies are subdued, and slaves are said to be subdued. It means bringing someone or something under your control, your authority, so that it does your will.

Well, in a creation as yet without any sin, the *negative* connotation cannot be there. Yet, we should understand from this word that the earth did not automatically bring forth its riches or its resources and drop them

at Adam's feet. No, man had to go and get them! Creation did not of itself bring forth all the fruits it had to offer man, but man had to work the earth and find ways to access those products, those materials. The earth was created as a place without sin, but not yet developed; a world with incredible, endless potential for growth, expansion, and advancement. But man had to go after it. Man and his labour are like a key which unlocks the potential of the earth.

We see that so clearly in Eden itself. In the garden the LORD started Adam and Eve off with a grove of fruit trees from which they could pick and eat. He gave them a stock supply of food to get them going, but He expected them to work for their daily bread too. The LORD had also given man every seed-bearing plant for food. But to receive the benefits of that, to receive a crop of wheat or barley or *boerenkool* or potatoes or whatever else they had at their disposal, man would have to *work*. Man had to till the earth of Eden. Man had to *cultivate* – just exactly what some of you have been doing on the fields with your big John Deeres and Case tractors, and others inside the greenhouses, Adam and Eve were called to do in the Garden of Eden. In order for them to receive the benefit of the seed-bearing plants, they had to plant the seeds and nurture them along.

You see, brothers and sisters, a sinless world does not equal a work-less world. It's a common misconception that many of us have and we need to get rid of it. Work is a good thing, a blessed thing! People often carry this misconception forward to the future, to heaven and the next life. They think it's going to be a place of eternal rest from work where we constantly sing God's praises in one great big massive choir. Even unbelievers, when they come around to think of heaven, see us as angels simply floating on the clouds and eating *Philadelphia Cream Cheese*.

But the Bible knows nothing of that at all! We will remain fully human when we die and on the Last Day we will be raised from the dead in this very same flesh. And we in our glorified flesh will be brought not only to a

new heaven, but also to a new *earth*, to this present earth made new by the purifying fire of God. Is there any reason to think we won't do then what we were created to do in the beginning? We are people of the earth given dominion over the earth. Why wouldn't we carry on that task now in perfection under the Kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ?

So having dominion over the earth is to subdue the earth with our daily work. It means bringing creation under our control – not to dominate it as a cruel task master, not to mistreat it, but to bring out the potential within! We should be *more* concerned than the environmentalists to care for this earth, because, unlike them, we know it is God's handiwork and we are to keep this creation as God's image bearers! And God would never abuse His own work!

Instead, our task is to work with the raw materials provided by God and develop them in accordance with their nature. To make them do what they can do and make them be what they can be as the LORD gave every part of His creation its ability. By bringing that ability and possibility to light and making it happen, we show not only the wonder of creation, but through this work of our hands we demonstrate the wisdom, power, and majesty of the Creator! Whatever beauty we can develop, whatever technology we can produce, whatever good and useful purpose we can make the earth and its resources serve, all of it is only possible because God created the earth with that potential and He created us with that ability!

And this applies to the animals just as well – we are to rule over them. We are to exercise authority over them so that they too can fulfill their potential for advancement and development. Let's think of Adam and Eve's situation again to make this more concrete. There they were in the Garden of Eden with the command to work the earth. How were they going to do that? Perhaps at first they began with their hands in the soil, but it's not hard to imagine that they soon reached for a branch of a tree to form some kind of basic hoe or shovel. We know for a fact that all sorts of animals roamed



through Eden, including undoubtedly horses and bulls, so the thought could not be too far from Adam's mind to harness the strength of these animals in order to help him till the earth. That way he could till more of it faster, harvest a bigger crop and thus sustain a larger population. But to harness a horse or an ox he would need to fashion ropes, and so on and so forth. Ruling over the animals leads to the invention of certain technologies, which themselves aid the development of creation's potential.

So what this means, Beloved, is that every day when you go to work – whether it's in steel manufacturing or in the greenhouses, whether it's pouring concrete or pulling nails, whether it's on the tractor or in the barn, whether you're in primary, secondary, or tertiary industry, whether you're in service work or administrative labour, whether you buy and sell, whatever your daily occupation is, you are exercising dominion over the earth. You've got a part in this creation mandate. It may be a small part or a big part, but your daily work in some way, shape or form contributes to the development of the world for the glory of God.

It's all the more important for us to understand this and work from this perspective, for most of the world has lost this concept. In this fallen world, mankind in general no longer works for God's glory but for his own needs, his own satisfaction, his own pleasure. Sinful man sees work as a means to exalt himself, to get rich, to make his life better – man actually makes *himself* to be god.

For most people, work is a necessary evil. You've heard people say or maybe you've said it yourself: *I'm just working for the pay check*. Work for most is drudgery. Many divide the week up into “pre hump-day” and “post hump-day.” Once you're through Wednesday, hump-day, then you're within reach of the weekend where you can finally have some fun and relax. In our culture, everybody's working for the weekend! And so work for the world has lost its meaning, its value and its purpose.

But brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus has changed all that for those

who belong to him! His redemption goes beyond our souls to include our bodies and indeed all of creation! By His death the Lord has removed the curse from over us and so restored the creation mandate, our cultural mandate to work as kings and queens in God's creation! Our work is not useless toil any longer, for it has value in Christ. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Your labour in the Lord is not in vain!” You're not just working for a pay check and you aren't living for the weekend, but every day your labour brings to light a little piece of creation's potential and through that the world sees a glimpse of God's own glory. A glimpse which is also seen in our families and in our marriages.

## Our marriages

For the LORD connects our dominion over the earth very strongly with the procreation of children. “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.’” Part of exercising dominion over the earth is to populate the earth with many people – *fill the earth*, says the LORD!

This is quite understandable when you consider Adam and Eve's task from a practical point of view. How were they, just two human beings, ever going to tame this big, big world? In order to really rein in creation, to tap its resources and develop it, Adam and Eve needed more man-power – simple as that. And in God's wisdom, that man-power would come through the birth of children within the context of marriage. The growth of our families is every bit a part of our cultural mandate to subdue the earth as work itself.

Now, before we go further, I'd like you to think about God's design here. The way He dealt with man stands in direct contrast to the way God dealt with the animals. If you look back to v.20, you find, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” We have something similar in v.24, “Let the land

produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.” The water creatures, the birds and the land animals were created in a multitude, in a variety of species and with more than one of each kind. But when God made man, He only made *one person* – Adam. Later that day He made Eve as well, but there was no multiple species of mankind, and there was no multitude of people. The LORD could have made a hundred thousand people at first. He could have given Adam and Eve many helpers immediately, but by the end of the sixth day there was only *one* male and *one* female. And God brought them together as husband and wife and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply.

Isn't that remarkable? Marriage and the raising of children is God's specially chosen method to populate the earth, to subdue it, to have dominion over it. There's a lot of truth in the saying: “the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” Those hands are raising up a generation of kings and queens to rule over God's creation for His glory! Marriage is therefore truly the basic building-block of society, part of God's holy design and plan, and any effort to make marriage into something other than the union of one man and one woman is from the devil – make no mistake!

The homosexual attack on marriage today – and let's add to that the Mormon perversion of polygamy – wants to undermine the redeeming work of Christ by destroying God's creation pattern. They strive to prevent man from going forward with his dominion over the earth as God's image-bearer. Stop marriage, break-down marriage and you break-down the kingdom of God!

But we who are married in the Lord work to promote the redeeming work of Christ right in our own homes and families. It's important that we connect marriage to having dominion over the earth. When we think about what the Bible says about marriage, we tend to jump immediately to Genesis 2, where Eve is formed from Adam's side and then given to him in

marriage. And that is a very key text, but let's understand today that already in Genesis 1:28 the LORD spoke in a summary way about marriage, about the coming together of male and female in a relationship that would produce offspring. He also spoke about children who would grow up and take their place beside their parents in the subduing of the earth.

Let's see here that it is God's *command*, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth...” Having children for a married couple is not optional – it's *commanded*. Now, I know there are legitimate exceptions to this rule. In our fallen world, God also sometimes gives to some individuals the gift of being content as a single person. The Lord Jesus speaks about that and the Apostle Paul was one such person. Such a person has different opportunities and responsibilities to exercise dominion over the earth and spread the kingdom of God.

You can also think of married people who are physically unable to have children, or to have more children than they presently have. As a result of the general corruption of sin, this does happen and is often a source of great sorrow. Think of barren Rachel in the Bible, or Hannah, or Elizabeth. Such couples should understand that their marriage is still in every way a complete marriage. We'll speak about this more in Genesis 2, but marriage is the joining of one man to one woman under God. Children are an *addition* to that if God wills it, a wonderful blessing upon that, but children do not of themselves make or break a marriage.

It's also true that a childless couple can in time come to see that God has a different purpose for their lives and presents them with different opportunities to serve in His kingdom. But it often still hurts deeply that they can't have children of their own. That sorrow highlights that childless couples are the exception to the general rule that married people, and then particularly married *believers*, are to be fruitful and multiply. And that's the point now: children should be *desired* by those who marry! If you don't want children, don't get married!

And children should not be desired in the first place because they are so cute (though they are!), nor to carry on our family name. They are not to be a source of *pride* for us, but to be a source of *glory* for God! A lot of people today want kids in order to have a nice family for themselves. One boy, one girl, kind of like one for Dad and one for Mom. But the children are not for Mom and Dad, they are for the Lord! They are not even *from* Mom and Dad ultimately, but they are from the Lord and so they are *for* the Lord!

Brothers and sisters, bearing children, being fruitful must be connected with having dominion over the earth as image bearers of God – don't forget that! The Lord Jesus has renewed that part of our creation mandate too and has given purpose and meaning to child bearing. It's not just to keep the human race going, but it's to expand the kingdom of God and raise up new kingdom citizens!

Now, I know all sorts of questions come up with this subject – how many children is enough? How many is being “fruitful?” And may we try to space out their births, either by the natural rhythm method or manufactured birth control? These are challenging questions best explored by someone in a separate speech sometime, but let this principle be clear right now: children should be *desired* in our marriages! They should be prayed for, and they should be raised to know their task in this world as rulers over creation for God's glory.

When we see this grand perspective, then the work of a mother, of a house-wife, is not a minor task, not something done by default. It is in no way inferior to being a president of a company or a professor in a university. Feminism has taught women today to divide up their lives into their careers and their families – and they put the emphasis on careers. But they don't understand that raising a family is the most important career you can have. It's a life's calling and a life's work that will have far greater consequences than most anything else we do for we are training up the next generation.

That's not to say that raising the children is just for the mothers. It's equally the role of the fathers, too. Our text says: “God said to *them*, ‘Be fruitful and multiply...’” *to them*, to Adam and Eve *together*. It's true that a father will be busy at work exercising dominion over the earth, but don't forget the children God put in your care. They're not going to learn the LORD's ways by osmosis – it's not going to come automatically. Mother will teach, but so must Father as Proverbs 4:1 says, “Listen, my sons, to a *father's* instruction; pay attention and gain understanding.”

So how about it, fathers, are you instructing your children? You can be at work fourteen hours a day, six days a week to subdue the earth, but are you putting the same kind of effort into raising your children? The same God who commanded you to work also commands you to teach and raise your children – don't let work cancel that out. Or your hobbies or leisure time. Keep things in biblical balance. And don't put it on the school to teach them about the Lord and His ways, and don't leave it to the catechism teacher either. If it isn't coming from Dad and Mom in the first place, if isn't taught and modeled in your kitchen, living room, and bedrooms, then all the rest won't amount to a hill of beans.

In Christ, this life is not a rat race – it's a dignified and purposeful exercising of God's dominion. It's not a vicious cycle of birth, life, death. You don't just work forty years and then drop from exhaustion into the grave and that's all there is. God put you here to live in fellowship with Him and to work for His glory. Christ redeemed you from sin to enable you to live that way again. Work hard, but work with Christian vision. Conduct yourself with honour to show something of God's holiness to the world. And then teach your children all about it. Pass on the crown God has given you to the next generation and watch God's kingdom grow right into eternity.

AMEN!

## SABBATH DELIGHT!

*By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done.*

– Genesis 2:2,3



**W**e've seen throughout Genesis 1 that God's creative activity comes to a climax on the sixth day. In a very pointed and deliberate manner, the LORD took six days to create the world, beginning with its foundations, moving on to various life forms, and finally crowning it with His last creative act, the making of man. Man is not only the last of God's works but also the closest to God Himself, for God made man in His own image, His own likeness. So Genesis 1 ends on a crescendo of God's amazing works: "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was *very good*" (Genesis 1:31, RSV).

But we would be mistaken to think that the creation account is now over, that everything comes to a halt on the sixth day, for there is also a seventh day. Unfortunately, the chapter divisions in our Bibles – divisions which, by the way, are not original to the text and so not inspired – put an artificial separation between the first six days of creation week and the

last day, for they belong together. The seven days are a unit. You can't understand the seventh day without the other six, for the first six days actually lead up to their own climax in the seventh day! God's creative work was over on the sixth day, to be sure, but His *purpose* in creating the world only comes to fulfillment in the seventh day, the day of rest. Every work of God's hands, every act of creation leads up to the celebration of the Sabbath Day.

I proclaim to you this Word of God,

***God gives the day of rest as a blessing for man***

**1. The divine pattern**

**2. The divine purpose**

**The divine pattern**

Our text begins with these words: "Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array." It's a summary statement of all the previous work of the six days. Moses wants to leave no doubt that by the end of the sixth day creation was finished. The amazing and majestic work of the Creator has concluded, and all in six days of ordinary length.

But that's not the end of the story – not yet. It could have been though. It would have been simple enough for the LORD to just leave things at that. Creation was over, everything was good. "Now, let's carry on with the business of creation. Let man begin his task to subdue the earth, let my Name be glorified in man's work." At the end of Genesis 1 we could be fully expecting a six-day week with every day meant for work.

And yet God gives another day, a very special day. V.2 of our text reads, "By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work." The Creator took an extra day. He did so not to create anything, but to *rest* and in doing so the LORD

made the week *seven* days, not six. The divine pattern from the beginning of the world has been: six days labour, one day rest.

This pattern, brothers and sisters, is not just what God happened to do Himself but with unmistakable intention He *created* this pattern and *revealed* this pattern. He gave the day of rest for the benefit of His creation, especially man, the one charged with *working* in creation. The cultivation of the earth was not to be an all-consuming task, but one day in seven man was to rest from that labour, just as God rested from His work on that day.

That this pattern is to be man's pattern is clear from the fourth commandment as we find it Exodus 20:11. The reason the Israelites had to rest on the Sabbath Day is given by the LORD as follows:

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

*Take your rest on the seventh day, Israel, just as I rested on the seventh day at the beginning!*

Now, there are some who do not think that the Sabbath Day in the fourth commandment is the same as the seventh day of the creation week. Some – also some sincere members of Reformed churches – are of the opinion that the Sabbath came into existence for the first time in the days of Israel and was basically an Old Testament, Jewish institution. They argue that the word "Sabbath" does not appear in Genesis 2 and only shows up for the first time in Moses' day. Based on this they conclude that the Sabbath Day was a temporary institution, an Old Testament shadow that has been abolished at the coming of Christ, the reality. Just like we don't sacrifice animals on the altar anymore and no longer observe the feasts of the Old Testament, so we no longer have a Sabbath Day to observe in the New Testament era, they say.

However, what they overlook is the connection the LORD Himself makes between the seventh day of creation and the Sabbath Day. He says

first in Exodus 20, “Remember the Sabbath Day.” How could something be “remembered” if it had not existed for some time and been generally known? The Sabbath is not instituted for the first time on Mt. Sinai, but the LORD says: “Remember it! Remember what I’ve already given in the past!” Just like all the other nine commandments existed as God’s perfect will for man from the beginning, so too the Sabbath rest. And then the LORD pointedly recalls what they are to remember when He gives the reason behind their weekly rest. “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day.” *Remember how I did things at creation and follow the same pattern!*

There is still a stronger connection. Not only is the reason for the Sabbath entirely dependent on God’s pattern of six days labour, one day rest, but the LORD specifically says in the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment, “...but He rested on the *seventh* day. *Therefore* the LORD blessed the *Sabbath* day and made it holy.” You see that? The LORD says He rested on the *seventh* day (as our text says) and for that reason blessed the *Sabbath* day and made it holy! The LORD Himself calls the seventh day of creation the Sabbath Day. Beloved, that can only mean that there has been a holy Sabbath day not just since the days of Mt. Sinai under Moses, but since the days of creation under the LORD Himself!

Notice also in our text the emphasis on the word “rest.” It is mentioned twice – God rested from His work. And that verb “to rest” is the verbal form of the noun “Sabbath.” Literally our text says that God “sabbathed” from all His work on the seventh day! Sabbath simply means, “to rest, to cease from labour.” So, even though the noun “Sabbath” is not used in Genesis 2, the verb shows that from the beginning God gave man a Sabbath Day, a day of rest!

You could compare this to the gift of marriage which is described later in this same chapter. We find there the detailed account of how God first made Adam on his own but this was found to be “not good” (Genesis 2:18).

The LORD then caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and from one of his ribs He made the woman, Eve. And then we read that the LORD, “brought her to the man” and that a man will leave his parents and cleave to his wife. Now, does anyone doubt that the LORD describes here the institution of marriage? The word “marriage” is not used. It is not called a “marriage ceremony.” It is not described out-rightly as a binding together for life of husband and wife, and yet everyone understands from the description that this is the beginning of marriage as an institution for all mankind. Well, in the same way our text describes the key features of the Sabbath Day without mentioning it by name, and so we can say with confidence that the Sabbath Day has existed from creation.

This means, Beloved, that the Sabbath Day, the day of rest, carries on also today. Just like the cultural mandate of Genesis 1 and holy matrimony of Genesis 2 continue so long as this earth continues, so also the pattern of six days labour, one day rest continues. It is the pattern laid down by God and given to men to follow. This creation pattern was never abolished by anyone, least of all the Lord Jesus.

A lot of people think that Christ put an end to the Sabbath Day, but when you read the Gospels you discover that the Lord Jesus did everything He could to uphold, honour, and fulfill the Sabbath Day! And it was He who said in our reading of Mark 2, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Notice that carefully, “The Sabbath was made for man,” not “The Sabbath was made for the Israelites,” but for *man*! The Sabbath was not just for the period of shadows pointing to the Messiah’s work, not just for the covenant people. No, the Sabbath was made for mankind – all of humanity! That’s a direct reference to our text, to the institution of the Sabbath at creation intended for the benefit of all people!

For the Lord Jesus constantly went right back to the beginning, to the founding principles of creation, to the way things were meant to be. Remember what He said about marriage. When the Pharisees challenged

Him about the divorce laws as given through Moses, the Lord responded, “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8, RSV). *From the beginning it was not so.* So it is with the Sabbath – *you Pharisees have made the Sabbath a heavy yoke for the people, but from the beginning it was not so! The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*

The divine pattern of six days work, one day rest has not, in essence, changed since creation. It’s true that since the fall into sin the Sabbath took on *additional* significance, but it never lost its *original* significance! The LORD did incorporate it into the system of ceremonial law in order to foreshadow the coming spiritual rest we would have in Christ, but that never cancelled out the original resting from our labour! In fact, in our fallen world that Sabbath rest from work is needed on a weekly basis more than ever! For unlike Adam at creation we labour under the effects of sin! The curse of sin still hangs over all creation, still affects our work so that we have to till the earth by the sweat of our brow.

Think of how your daily work goes. Does anyone have a job where everything goes smoothly all the time, where it’s just “tickety-boo” day in, day out? Moms have to manage temperamental and moody children who don’t always obey. Managers have to keep in line employees who bicker or complain. Mechanics have to wrestle with cantankerous car parts as they fix vehicles. Students have to struggle at times with Math or English or Phys-ed. Farmers may sit in the air-conditioned cab of their Case tractors, but they still have to combat weeds and rodents, not to mention inclement weather. And there’s still plenty of sweat in a farmer’s life. Salesmen have to deal with supply lines that don’t always deliver as promised and customers who don’t always pay as promised – is there anyone who will say “My job is easy! My work is a piece of cake!?”

From labour that is taxed by the curse of sin, we need a day of rest now more than ever. Let’s embrace the Sabbath Day and be thankful for it! It’s a

gift from God by which we may be refreshed; it’s a weekly oasis in what is often a trying and burdensome work-week. It’s a day for us to be renewed in the Lord.

## The divine purpose

For as valuable and important as the physical rest from labour is to our bodies, there is much more to the Sabbath Day. The LORD says in v.3, “And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done.” The pattern is very clear: God rested on the seventh day so man should rest on the seventh day. But the question is: what does it mean that God rested? If we are to pattern our rest after God’s rest, what did God do when He rested?

Most people think of resting as taking a needed breather from work – like taking an afternoon nap which many of us may do today. Did God take that kind of rest? Did He take a nap on the seventh day? Or simply put His feet up, so to speak, and relax after a very busy week of work? The answer is a very definite “no!” The LORD does not need any kind of a break or rest from His work! He is the Almighty, powerful God who never gets tired, and who neither sleeps nor slumbers (Psalm 121:4). In fact, the LORD, even on the Sabbath Day, continues to work in exercising His providential care over all creation. If the LORD did not uphold the fabric of the universe by the power of His hand every second of every day, this world would instantly implode. The LORD Jesus said it too in John 5:17 when accused of working on the Sabbath, “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”

No, the LORD didn’t stop work because of a *need*, but because of a *desire* to take pleasure in the work of His hands, a desire to commune and have fellowship with the creatures He had just created! Notice in v.3 that God “rested from all the work of creating that He had done.” The LORD was perfectly capable of going on with creating new things. The LORD

*could* have, if He had so desired, continued with His work of creating new things each day for eternity. He would never have run out of ideas or power, but instead His plan was to put an end to His work of creating in order to enjoy that completed work in communion with man, whom He made in His own image. He purposely stopped His creating work and took a day to reflect upon His creative labour and enjoy His excellent handiwork.

Actually, the LORD took more than a day. For there is something missing from our text that we might have expected. For every other day of the creation week we read, “and there was evening and there was morning, a first day...a second day...” and so on. But when it comes to the seventh day, there is no such expression. It’s absence is very noticeable and stark compared to the other days and it tells us that God’s Sabbath rest from His creating work has no end!

That means that the LORD did not start another new project somewhere. The LORD did not leave off creating this universe to go create another universe somewhere else. No, the LORD has *sabbathed* from His creating work and so remains actively involved in *this* creation, actively taking His joy from communing with His creatures. You see, the weekly Sabbath Day is a reminder for us that the LORD is with us still, that He desires fellowship with man, that He means to take pleasure in His creation which He finished long ago on the sixth day!

The Sabbath Day then, is the end-goal of God’s creating work. The six-day creation is not in itself the goal. The ongoing work of man is not itself the greatest purpose, as if God set up a giant, self-contained activity centre that just goes on and on doing its work.

Sometimes children will do that, right? Maybe they set up a *Lego* town or a *Duplo* work site, or maybe a train set complete with a village. And then you’ll see the kids have fun watching the train go round the track and pick up a load of coal here or drop off a load of lumber there; moving these people around and those vehicles back and forth. It’s a great big play centre,

which keeps the kids happy so long as it stays in motion. There is enjoyment in the play itself, in the action, in the working of the toys, but as soon as the kids leave the room, everything falls quiet. The toys stand still, alone. And the children go away, alone.

But when it comes to creation, the LORD never leaves! To be sure, the LORD does take pleasure in the work of man, in the business of subduing the earth for God’s glory, but He wants more than that. He also wants to take pleasure *in man himself!* The LORD rests from His work in order to give Himself to man, to speak with Him, to commune with Him, to be His God and Father and for man to know himself to be God’s son – and that’s the great blessing of the Sabbath Day! The LORD wants man to be quiet, to rest for one day in seven in order to enjoy concentrated communion with his Maker.

For look how the LORD treats this day. Our text says, “And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” He *blessed* this day! He made it *holy!* Each of the six days of creation brought forth one amazing thing after the other, but none of those days is blessed. The sixth day saw the crown of all God’s wondrous works in the creation of man – man who was created in the very image of God – and yet God did not make that day holy. No, the LORD highlighted the *Sabbath Day* as the favoured day, the blessed day, the holy day!

This day is given to man to set aside his daily work in order to spend time with his Maker, in order to worship Him and commune with Him. The cultural mandate to have dominion over the earth for the glory of God, though it is a blessing in itself, is still not the highest end, not the loftiest goal for man. But resting on the Sabbath Day as God rested from His work, putting down the hoe and shovel, the wrench and pen; putting a “closed” sign on your business, leaving off all work that can be left off, to then spend time worshipping your Creator together with His people, reflecting on His wonderful works, communing with Him in your heart through His Holy



Spirit – *that's* the highest end for which we were created! Man was created to praise and worship the LORD in all of life, but that worship comes to its fullest expression, it's most focused and beautiful display in Sabbath rest, Sabbath fellowship, Sabbath worship!

The day of rest should never be reduced to a day *merely* of relaxation, though it certainly involves physical rest. That's how some people take it, even some who claim the name of Christ. They are willing to set aside their daily work but then stay home from church in order to “rest.” They speak piously about worshipping God in creation, and they'll do that, they say, even out on the golf course or going to the beach or working in the garden. But they think little or nothing of the worship services conducted by the body of Christ. *I don't need to go to church.* There where God's holy Word is opened, read, and proclaimed, there where the holy sacraments are given, there where the holy people of God gather in holy assembly to adore, praise, honour and glorify their Creator and Redeemer, to *that* place they do not wish to go. What is that but turning the *Lord's* Day into *man's* day? Though it may be cloaked with pious talk, they have turned the Sabbath day into a day for man's pleasure and not God's glory. They have forgotten that this is a *holy* day.

I'd like you to notice that. A lot of Christians argue that special, holy days belong to the Old Covenant and are all a shadow pointing to Christ. Now that Christ has come, they say, and conquered sin and redeemed creation, no day is special anymore but rather every day is holy! But what they forget is that before sin ever entered the world, before there ever was a holy day given through Moses, the Creator from the beginning set aside one day in seven as holy, as apart from the others, as distinct. And this gets emphasized in the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God” – *to the LORD your God.* It's not a Sabbath unto yourself. It's not a Sabbath rest for your family in the first place. Rather, it's a day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God! It's a

day to promote His glory in your worship, and not your pleasure through your play – *remember the Sabbath Day!* Set aside your daily labour to spend time with your Maker in holy communion. That's how you remember the Sabbath Day!

Do we not have even more reason today to celebrate the day of rest? I know that much could be said about the historical transition from resting on the seventh day to resting on the first day. Unfortunately, much of it we don't have time for in this service. But I do want you to think of God's *purpose* in giving the Sabbath Day, and then God's purpose in sending His Son after the fall into sin.

When man fell, that Sabbath Day was ruined. It was never the same anymore. The fellowship with God was broken. It used to be that God would come daily to walk in the Garden of Eden and speak with Adam and Eve, but now the LORD had to expel man from the garden. Gone was that intimate fellowship, that Sabbath communion. Sabbath communion was emptied and became a hollow shell of what it once was.

But didn't Christ come precisely to restore that? Isn't Christ's work all about bringing about that fellowship with God, that peace with God which we lost in Paradise? We see it in every Lord's Supper celebration. The blood of Christ was shed and His body was broken for the complete forgiveness of all our sins – why? So that we might be welcomed into the presence of God again, so that we might have holy communion with Him again, so that we might truly have our Sabbath back again. Christ didn't come to *abolish* the Sabbath but to fulfill it, renew it, and restore it to its created purpose! To give the day of rest its full value once again as a day of communion with our Maker.

And *when* did Christ accomplish this task? Christ paid the price on the cross, but then sealed the victory in the day of His resurrection, the *first day of the week!* To say it simply, Christ restored the Sabbath Day, the Sabbath rest, *on Sunday*, the first day of the week, and that's what makes this day the

New Testament Sabbath! That's what makes the *first* day set apart from all the others, holy to the Lord. That's what marks this day as the day of rest in Christ's new covenant. Is it not then a day for great rejoicing? Is it not a day to focus our attention on God's wondrous act of creation and equally His marvellous act of re-creation in Christ?

Sunday is not a drag – not if you are a believer. You don't ask, "Why can't I go play golf? Where does it say in the Bible you have to go to church twice on Sunday?" People who ask those questions haven't got a clue what the Sabbath is all about. But if you see the Sunday as a Sabbath rest in fellowship with your God, then you'll ask, "What can I do to embrace that fellowship? How can I get closer to my God? How can I praise and glorify Him? In what ways can I promote communion with the LORD in my family? In the church?" Then you will experience the blessedness of the Sabbath as the LORD gave it from the beginning. Then the day of rest will be for you a day of deep refreshment, for body and soul. The Sabbath will then be a delight for you and glorifying to God.

AMEN!

## COVENANT IN THE GARDEN

*The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there He put the man he had formed...A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.*

– Genesis 2:7,8,10



**A**s we move into Genesis 2 it is helpful to keep in mind that Genesis is the book of beginnings. The very name "Genesis" is taken from a Greek work which means: "birth, generation," pointing to the start of life, the start of new things. And in the original Hebrew the very first word of Genesis, of the Bible, is the word: "beginning" – *in the beginning*. The book of Genesis is concerned with the origins, the beginnings of things as we know them still today, and throughout its 50 chapters we find relayed a series of beginnings, one after the other.

What we've seen so far in Genesis 1-2:3 is a sweeping overview of the beginning of all creation, from A to Z. In a short but simple, factual account, Moses tells us how God created the heavens and the earth and all therein. But now in this text and indeed the rest of chapter 2, the inspired author narrows his focus to describe a more particular beginning, the beginning of *mankind*.

A lot of people get confused or frustrated when they go from Genesis 1 into Genesis 2 because part of chapter 2 seems like a duplication of chapter 1 and parts even appear to contradict the first chapter. It may seem at first that chapter 2 is a second account of the origins of the *world*, but in fact what we have here, Beloved, is the detailed account of the origins of *man*. It's not rehashing what was done in the six days of creation, but it is taking a microscope, so to speak, to the sixth day of creation and particularly to the moment when man was created. It's about how man was formed, where man was placed, what man was charged with, what opportunities, resources and materials man was given to work with, and who man was given as a helper. And so it is that God reveals here some very important things about man, about us and our relationship to our Creator.

I proclaim to you this Word of God:

### *God covenants with man in the Garden of Eden*

#### **1. The garden of delight**

#### **2. The covenant of delight**

### **The garden of delight**

What may throw us off at first is the opening sentence of our text, "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created." On its own this leads you to expect another version of or at least more information on the six day creation week, and yet there's more to it. The word "account" is literally the word "generation" or "descendants," regularly used in Genesis at the beginning of the historical account of a man and his family. For example, in Genesis 5:1 we read, "This is the written account of Adam's line" and what follows is the genealogy of Adam, a list of his descendants.

In our text then, the "generation" of the heavens and the earth is what came forth from the heavens and the earth, what was *generated* by them

and produced by them, and then you can understand how mankind is the focus of that generation. For v.7 says that "...the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." By the power of God, man is generated from the earth itself. Just like by God's power children are born to Adam, so by God's might Adam is, you could say, born of the soil, of the earth. We truly are *earth-lings!*

It's good to reflect on that for a moment. You and I have our physical origins in the dust of the earth. Our bodies are nothing more than particles of soil fused together by God's incomprehensible wisdom. From dust we were taken and to dust we shall return. Check in any grave after a period of time and all you'll find is dust, and only a thin layer at that.

Kind of humbling, isn't it? We're often complaining about dust – how many of you didn't dust your house in the last two days? Or wash the dust off your car? Dust is something we avoid, something we get rid of, and yet ironically we don't often relate dust to ourselves.

We often think we're quite high up on the ladder, that we're something else, that we're pretty hot. We can sometimes stand for quite a long time in front of the mirror and admire our good looks, or we can be filled with pride at our accomplishments, at our standing in the community, at the strength of our bodies, at the important work we do. We can look down our long noses at others who don't have the abilities we have or who aren't quite as good looking. But brothers and sisters, let's not kid ourselves! At the end of the day we are but living dust! We can sing it in Psalm 103:5, "He knows our frame, that it is weak and humble; / He keeps in mind how prone we are to stumble. / The LORD recalls that we are only dust." The *LORD* recalls it, *He* keeps it in mind – how about you, Beloved? Do you live in the acute awareness that you are but walking dust?

It's only then that you can understand God's grace in raising us up from the dust. For v.7 says, "the LORD God formed the man from the dust of

the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” Notice the care God takes in making man. With most other creatures and with all the rest of creation itself, God merely spoke and things came into being, but with man the LORD takes His time, so to speak. It’s almost a picture of a potter with his clay, forming and fashioning the mud into just the right shape, into the exact vessel he wanted to make. Only God is not just *forming* the dirt and the dust, but we read He, “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.” God took the soil, the dust, the earth, and animated it, infused it with something from Himself, the breath of life! Isn’t that marvellous?

Scientists still today cannot figure out how to make life, how to create life. They can manipulate the cells, they can set the right conditions for the cells to reproduce, but they cannot ignite the process, they cannot infuse a dead substance with a living spirit. They cannot make a new life, a new creature, a new beginning. And the reason they can’t, Beloved, and the reason they never will is because man’s life comes directly from the breath of God! God brought life into existence by His own Spirit and since no man can control God, no man will ever hold the power to create life.

And because God created human life, human life is precious and valuable. I want you to understand that well. Secular psychology talks a lot about self-esteem. Many people suffer from low self-esteem, they say. The answer is to think more highly of yourself, to take pride in yourself for who you are, and to consider yourself to be of importance and value, but *self-esteem* is an empty lie and an illusion. For the truth is, of ourselves, strictly on our own, we are nothing but a pile of dust, of no value whatsoever. No pile of dust has any reason to esteem itself.

But when the Creator of heaven and earth takes time to form that pile of dust into a person and breathes into that pile of dust the breath of life, *then* man gains relevance, meaning, and value. When God makes man a living being to know His Creator; when He even gives man charge over

all His creation as His vice-regent; when He makes man in His own image, that wondrous work of God infuses man with a preciousness that no one can take away. We must not get caught up in the cult of *self-esteem*, for that only drives us further away from God into ourselves. Rather, we must esteem God!

For as we exalt God and glorify our Creator, then we will see how His care, His effort, His breath of life give value to us as creatures. We are *not* worthless, our life is *not* meaningless or without value, and we do not need to remain in the pit of despair, for we are *God’s* handiwork! Our spirit comes to us from God’s own breath! God has invested in us, God is busy with us, God has a relationship with us, and *that’s* what makes us worth something!

You can see God’s care for man in making for him a garden of delight. Notice again the very personal attention the LORD gives to this, v.8, “Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there He put the man He had formed.” God planted the garden, not the angels. Nor was man given garden-building or landscaping as his first task, but the LORD planted it Himself and placed man in it – the Garden of Eden – literally, the garden of delight!

Now, this is not your typical vegetable garden that many of us have out back of the house. As much as I like my veggie patch, I wouldn’t want to live there. This garden was more like a big park or an arboretum. It would be something like Busch Gardens or the Royal Botanical Gardens, where over many acres of land you would have many varieties of fruit trees and shade trees, shrubs and flowers, meadows and pathways. This kind of garden-park was common for kings in the ancient world to place beside their palaces – you can think of king Nebuchadnezzar and his famous hanging gardens of Babylon. Some of the wealthier kings would even import both exotic plants and animals and have their own zoo in their garden.

So the LORD makes this kind of an arboretum-garden, stocked with all sorts of trees and shrubs and flowers, as well as all kinds of animals roaming freely about in harmony and peace. And there He places man to till it and keep it. This is man's first home, his model environment, the perfect place to start life.

And I'd like you to notice how it is described in v.9, "And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food." The LORD liberally supplies Adam with more than enough food so he can undertake his task of subduing the earth. But there's more than just food here, these trees "were pleasing to the eye," it says. These trees didn't only serve the practical purpose of feeding Adam and later Eve, but they were also beautiful to behold – and God made them that way on purpose.

Beauty or aesthetics is something we sometimes demote in our thinking and doing. We are practical people. As a Dutch immigrant community, we are well-known for our hard work and great production, for our efficiency and skill, but we're less known for our works of beauty, for our striking designs, for making things that please the eye, and yet that too is part of God's creation! We are mindful of the Proverb, "charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting." In this fallen world such things on their own can easily become a god, but are we equally mindful that when dedicated to God's glory, when done for His purposes, beauty is a blessing from above?

We like to say about things, "As long as it gets the job done" it doesn't really matter what it looks like. As long as the car gets you from point A to point B; as long as the roof over your head keeps you warm and dry; as long as it serves its purpose, the rest makes no difference. But brothers and sisters, *from the beginning* it was not so! Aesthetics and beauty and pleasing the eye is given us by God to enhance and enrich our life so as to make us all the more reflect on the beauty and majesty of our God. It is not a waste to have pleasing architecture, it is not vain to keep your yard manicured, it is not idleness to make even yourself beautiful (not sexy, but beautiful!) when you

do so mindful that it is a gift of God. A gift which must never be used to exalt your own name, but only God's Name!

The garden of delight was liberally supplied with food and beautiful to behold, and yet that's only the tip of the iceberg, for God also placed it in a special location. We learn in v.8 that He planted the garden, "in the East, in Eden," and then in the verses 10-14 we have an elaborate description of the garden's placement.

Now, on first read this passage seems rather obscure. We meet names of rivers and lands we aren't familiar with: Pishon, Havilah, Gihon, Cush. And then there is an apparently parenthetical comment about gold, resin, and onyx. It all seems like unnecessary detail and we quickly pass over it. Even scholars who try to work out the details and pinpoint the whereabouts of Eden run stuck because some points of geography are unknown to us now.

But if you see this not in the first place as a map to locate Eden and the garden, but as a description of the garden's strategic set-up, then the details come alive. Look with me at v.10. "A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters." A river watering the garden flowed *from* Eden. We often think that "Eden" is the name of the garden, but actually this verse together with v.8 shows a distinction between the area known as "Eden" and the garden that the LORD planted in that area. The river which waters the garden has its origin in Eden and flows from there into the garden, and then it separates into four headwaters. We should then picture the garden as immediately *adjacent to* Eden.

So if you took an aerial view of the area you would see Eden, where the river begins; then the garden through which the river passes; and then the wide-open world that is watered by the one river as it breaks up into four separate rivers. You cannot rightly understand the garden where Adam was placed until you appreciate the significance of the river which passes through it.

For the river has its source *outside* the garden in Eden. Now, we all know how important fresh water supply is. Manitoba is all up in arms because North Dakota wants to divert polluted water into the Red River. The fight for clean, fresh water in Manitoba even concerns Parliament Hill and the White House. The same is true in Bible times and all throughout the Bible we see water used as a symbol for maintaining life – water keeps people alive. Take the water away and people will soon die, but now the water which gives life to the garden where man is placed does not originate there where man dwells but *outside* of it where, by implication, God Himself dwells! The set-up of the garden and the flowing of the four rivers all trace their origin and their very life-supply to Eden itself, and who is it that supplies and sustains life if it is not the LORD God? The Garden of Eden is called three times in Ezekiel “*the garden of God*,” because it was not just man’s dwelling place, but also God’s! The LORD established in Eden His earthly sanctuary!

We see the same set-up coming back at the end of the Bible in Revelation 22. John is shown a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, the place where both God and man will once again dwell together. In Genesis it’s a garden, in Revelation it’s a city which shows a development in subduing the earth, but the essence of the arrangement is the same, v.1, “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.” Do you see that? The river of the water of life originates from the very throne of God, and proceeds outward to provide that living water to all the city’s inhabitants. And then notice another parallel to the Garden of Eden, “On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” The tree of life which stood there at the beginning will also be there at the end.

For the Garden of Eden is not just a piece of real estate in Mesopotamia, it is not just a pleasant place to live nor is it only a paradise for man to enjoy,

but it’s the residence of both God and man, both Creator and creature, in harmonious covenant.

## The covenant of delight

Perhaps you noticed another peculiar thing about our text. It begins already in v.4 and continues right through: the use of two names for the Creator, “the LORD God.” If you read back through chapter 1 where Moses describes the creation of all things, then he only uses the name “God,” but now when he focuses in on the creation of man, Moses adds the name “LORD.”

Now, notice how our English translation has LORD capitalized with four capital letters: L-O-R-D. That has a special meaning. It is the accepted translation of the Hebrew “Yahweh,” which means “*I AM WHO I AM*.” Yahweh is the Name specifically revealed to Moses at the burning bush as God was fulfilling His ancient covenant promises given to Abraham. While the name “God” is more a title for the Creator, Yahweh is the Creator’s personal name, the name which the LORD always associates with His covenant. Think of the preamble to the 10 Commandments, “I am the LORD (Yahweh) your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” – and then follows the Ten Words of the covenant.

So when the inspired Moses brings in the name Yahweh as man’s creation is described, He immediately draws our attention to the covenant. If you read quickly through our text, you can have the feeling that God set man up with a pretty good arrangement in the garden and then kind of went away into the background, returning to heaven perhaps. But brothers and sisters, God created man to live with Him in communion, fellowship and covenant! God is not distant, but Himself dwells in Eden and brings man into close proximity to Himself. The garden isn’t strictly man’s abode and it most certainly isn’t man’s personal play place to do with what he wants. No, God lives with man and God covenants with man. That’s also

why we see two distinct trees at the centre of the garden with commandments attached to them.

God isn't remote from the situation, but He gives man a task and charges him to be mindful of that one tree. The LORD by His very act of creation binds Himself to man in a relationship of love and delight. We will have to come back another time to those two trees, but let's understand right now, Beloved, that the whole structure of Eden and the garden shows God's intention from the start: to dwell with man in holy covenant!

God desires an intimate relationship of love, reverence, and obedience. Is that also your desire? Or do you believe in God just because that's all you know? Or because you don't want to end up in hell? Do you believe in God simply because you can't deny His existence? Or because you can't think of a better alternative?

Beloved, life is more than living, eternal life more than living forever, more than not dying. Life is to *know* your God, to live in communion with Him, in fellowship with Him, even in friendship with Him. Eden and the garden are meaningless without the LORD's covenant of delight. Brothers and sisters, don't just go through the motions of faith, but get to *know* your God, to love Him, and walk with Him day by day. Fill your life with meaning by taking up the LORD's covenant which He made with you, made now through the blood of His Son.

The LORD's love for us is still there, even more than ever, for when we broke the covenant in Adam, God repaired it in His Son. When we cut ourselves off from the tree of life and incurred eternal death, the LORD had His Son nailed to the tree of death in order to restore us to everlasting life. A life in covenant with God, a life that truly knows God in love and fellowship.

Would you like to have lived in the Garden of Eden? Set your mind on a higher goal, for in Christ you can go beyond Eden! For Christ takes us from the garden of God to the city of God where Father, Son, and Spirit

will dwell with us forever, as Revelation 22:4 says, "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face..." *They will see His face* – that is the delight of God's covenant, that is the joy of living!

Seek the face of your God today, go to Him in prayer through the blood of the Lamb, and look forward to the sweetness of paradise restored – to perfection.

AMEN!

## WEDDING GIFT

*Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.*

*– Genesis 2:22,23*



**W**e saw last time how Genesis 2 describes in some detail the particular creation of man. Chapter one recounted the beginning of the heavens and the earth and now chapter two provides the beginning of the human race. God carefully and purposefully forms man from the dust of the earth and breathes into him the breath of life. Human life springs into existence not by some chance explosion of molecules billions of years ago, not by the evolution of the ape, but by the singular creative act of the living God. What was in one moment a pile of dust became in the next instant Adam, the *living being*.

And what our text goes on to relate is the next step in mankind’s history, the creation of the woman. Adam starts his life alone. At the beginning of Day 6 he is the only human being but by the end of the day he has received a gift, a treasure of inestimable value – Adam receives his bride!



I proclaim to you this Word of God,

### *God forms woman as a helper fit for man*

#### 1. Adam's need

#### 2. Adam's rib

#### 3. Adam's wife

### Adam's need

When you think about the creation of man then one of the striking things is indeed that Adam is created *alone*. The LORD does not form two piles of dust, one into a man and the other into a woman. No, He makes only one creature, the man Adam. He plants a garden for Adam and places him there, says v.15, “to work it and take care of it.” Adam is on his own. While every other creature has its mate, while the animals were created in multiple numbers, Adam stands alone.

And what we must see in this, Beloved, is the Master Designer at work – there is always in the LORD's ways a purpose and a method. We saw it already in the six days of creation and even in the careful forming of Adam from the dust of the earth. The LORD does nothing without a reason. If you read through this account quickly then you may have the impression that God is doing things on the fly: He creates Adam but, upon further reflection, realizes that it's not good for man to be alone, so then He sets about to find a solution to the problem.

That's often how *we* work, isn't it? We don't have the ability to foresee every outcome or eventuality and so we often change our course and plan as we go, but brothers and sisters, the LORD God never does things on the fly! For Him the outcome and the consequences are always perfectly clear – it was not a *surprise* to Him that Adam needed a helper! Certainly the LORD could have created Adam and Eve in the same instant of time but He chose to do it in two distinct and deliberate steps.

A clue to the LORD's purpose comes at the beginning of our text, v.18, “The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” *It is not good for the man to be alone* – isn't that remarkable? For each of the previous five days of creation the Creator had observed His handiwork and every time could conclude, “*it was good*” – but not so after Adam's creation. There's something not right here.

“Good” in the context of the creation of all things does not only mean without sin but has the sense of being able to fulfil its created purpose. For example, a train without tracks to run on is no “good” to anyone; a pen with no ink serves no purpose and is not “good.” “Good” means the design is complete, the thing created is whole and nothing needs to be added or changed in order for it to serve God's purpose. So when Adam stands alone at the beginning of Day 6, he is not yet complete – something needs to be added in order to make the creation of man “good.”

And God wants Adam to realize that too – that's why He says it *out loud*. For the other five days God simply observed His creation as being good, but now He states it out loud in the presence of Adam, “It is not good for the man to be alone” – God says that for *Adam's* benefit. The LORD is leading Adam along here, revealing to him the incompleteness of his situation, showing him how he needs someone to fill the void and make things good. The LORD wants the man to understand and appreciate the woman he will soon receive.

That's also why God has Adam study all the animals. This may seem like an interlude in the story about woman's creation when seemingly “out of the blue” God brings the *animals* to Adam, but again the LORD does this with deliberate purpose. We find that in v.19, “He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.” Adam had to name the animals. That may not seem important to us for when we give names to things then it's usually without a lot of deep thought or rationale. The kids will name their

pet dog, “Fluffy,” or their pet rabbit, “Mopsy.” Parents will give their children names that sound unique or different, but very few have a distinct purpose or even know the meaning of the name.

But in Scripture the giving of names is always loaded with significance and purpose – even more so in the creation account. In Genesis 1 we find that *God* gave names to things: He called the light “day” and the darkness, “night.” He named the expanse “sky” and the ground “land” and the water “seas.” To give something a name in the Bible is to exercise authority over that thing. Even more, those names aren’t just pulled out of thin air, no, they are names that reflect the very essence or character of the thing named. The names are loaded with meaning.

So when God brings to Adam the animals to see what he would name them, then He gives Adam his first task in exercising dominion over the creatures. Instead of *God* giving them names which reveal their character, He gives that task to His ruling servant *Adam*. And when Adam then names all the animals he doesn’t simply pick names that have a nifty sound, nor does he choose names based on a whim. Rather, as God’s vice-regent, as God’s perfectly able appointed king, he looks with understanding into the nature of each animal and chooses a name based on what he sees there.

And through this important assignment God gives Adam a greater awareness of his own situation. Adam sees how all the animals have mates but he has none. Even more, Adam has contemplated the nature of the beasts: he has considered the cows and horses, the pigs and goats; he has understood the character of sheep and lions, wolves and tigers, giraffes and elephants. Adam has seen each of the species God has made and through it all is led to the conclusion in v.20, “But for Adam, no suitable helper was found.” The LORD knew that in advance, of course, but now Adam realizes it full well – in all this vast creation of animals, there is no match, there is no complement, there is no partner for man. Adam is still alone and it is *not* good.

Do you see the high position the Creator bestows upon the woman, Beloved? Without her, man is incomplete. Something is *not good* about his situation so long as she is not there. You can look high and low in all creation; you can live with apes in the jungles of Africa; you can be raised by wolves in the forests of America; you can be tended by tigers in the thickets of India but there is no creature that is suitable as a companion for man, there’s no creature anywhere like woman – husbands, do you realize that full-well about the wife God has given you? The LORD shows Adam how precious his future wife will be as someone to take away his aloneness – she’s the only one who can fill the vacuum and the void in his life. She’s the only one who can join him in his task as a companion fit for him – do you realize how precious your wife is, brothers?

Men tend to think that they are rather self-sufficient; that if push came to shove they could live just fine on their own, but brothers and sisters, that’s not the way God made things! It is true – and I don’t want to diminish that either – that a few people are given the gift of living alone in order to serve God’s kingdom in different ways. The Lord grants some the contentment of singleness and the ability to do particular work in His service, but those are exceptions! The rule of creation remains – *it is not good for man to be alone!* You men were created to be paired up with a wife, and you women were created to be joined to a husband as a helper fit for him.

Man was and is in need of a *helper*, says the LORD. Now, that word in our day has a kind of inferiority complex about it. A fellow in business for himself might hire a student for the summer and say about him, “He is my helper this year.” That implies that he is not the one in charge, that he is not the one running the show, but he simply helps out. He’s an extra pair of hands. He does what he’s told and gets paid at the end of the week. There’s a boss and then there’s a helper, and some have in the past read that sort of concept into our text, as if woman was made as the inferior assistant to man, to do man’s bidding. To basically keep her mouth closed, do as she’s told,

and be thankful she has a roof over her head, clothes on her back and food in her cupboards.

But that word “helper” in the Bible has quite the opposite connotation – it never refers to someone inferior or second-class or even in a lower position. In fact, this same word used to describe woman is also used to describe God in Psalm 47 as we sang it, “His the shields of earth, His the power the worth; / He the God on high is our Helper nigh.” God is man’s *Helper*, and in no way is He less than man! Psalm 69 as we took it on our lips says the same thing: “But as for me, my prayer is, LORD to Thee / At Thy own time, O God my Helper, hear me” – is there anything inferior about this Helper? A helper in the Bible provides the power or ability that is lacking in the one being helped! The fact that man needs a helper at all shows his utter inability to fulfill his God-given task on his own. It actually shows a *lack* in man, a need in man, and the helper is the one who has the special ability to fill that need!

So woman is created to help man complete the task of subduing the earth and ruling over the animals. Woman is the necessary complement to man – to help him populate the earth, to help him raise up the next generation of kings and queens, to be a companion for him in tilling the garden and keeping it. Man cannot do it alone, but he needs the companionship, the assistance, the blessing of a helper, whom God formed from Adam’s rib.

### Adam’s rib

For it is highly significant that God chooses to form woman from a part of Adam’s own body. We read in v.21, “So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, He took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh.” The LORD could have formed a second pile of dust at this time, independent from the man, and breathed into it the breath of life. But the LORD doesn’t do that. He takes a part of

man’s own body, from his side, and makes from it a helper fit for man.

That means that as much as man needs woman, so woman is *dependent* on man for she comes from man. If we need to guard against male chauvinism in our time so we also need to guard against so-called Female Liberation. The Feminist movement teaches that women are totally independent of man, can be happy and content on their own, and are in no way bound to men. Feminism proclaims that women are free to serve themselves but the Bible says woman was made as a helper fit for man – woman’s existence is intricately connected to man. God created her *out* of man and *for* man’s benefit as his complement and co-worker in subduing creation and any perversion of that will not lead to peace and contentment but to unrest and bitterness.

Let me be clear: we find here a very distinct creation order. Man was made first, then woman from the man. That was done on purpose and has meaning, as the Apostle Paul says concerning the worship services of the church in 1 Timothy 2:12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul exhorts that a woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head, “For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” There is a difference in roles here: man is head of his wife and has authority over his wife – notice how he shows that later in our text when Adam names God’s new creation, “She shall be called woman...” Man is leader, man is the responsible head while the woman is submissive helper.

But let me be equally clear: this difference in roles in no way means a difference in equality, in worth or value! So many people accuse the Bible and us Christians of being patriarchal and domineering over women, but what the Bible teaches is not dominance but headship; not husbands lording it over their wives and ordering them around, but husbands loving their wives as their own body and caring for them with tender love just like

Christ cares for His bride. We'll look at that more in the next sermon (the Lord willing), but let's remember now that our model for marriage and specifically the husband's model is how Christ loves His bride – the church. And how does Christ treat her? He is her Lord but He became a slave in order to save her. The church despised Him but He sacrificed for her benefit. He has authority over her but He is never rough or abusive. Rather, He is always kind and gentle. He consistently puts her needs ahead of His own. Christ treats His bride like His own body, in purity of love – should we not treat our wives as our own body? Doesn't God show that too when He makes the woman out of Adam's own rib?

For what the LORD presented to Adam after he awoke from his deep sleep was not some creature remote from himself. Not some different species as yet unknown to Adam, but what the Creator brought was Adam's own flesh! Adam even cries out in joy, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!" How could Adam ever demean *his wife*, his own flesh?

You see, husbands who abuse their wives or who boss them around or treat them as second class citizens have never understood that how they treat their wives is in fact how they treat themselves – she is flesh of your flesh! If you put her down, you put yourself down. If you treat her like dirt, you treat yourself like dirt. If you despise her, you despise yourself – don't you understand that she is bone of your bones? Just like you don't endanger yourself or beat yourself or hate yourself, so it must never even cross your mind to do that to your wife – she is God's gift to you as suitable helper!

And that word "suitable" in our text means something like "corresponds to." Unlike any of the animals, the woman corresponds to the man; she is matched well with the man to help and assist him in his God-given task. And that certainly means producing godly offspring, being fruitful as God commanded in Genesis 1:28, but that's not all it means. Wives are not just to stay barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen all the time! That may have been society's ideal 50 years ago but it was never God's ideal – that's why we read Proverbs 31.

This chapter describes the noble wife that few can find – the wife who acts as the helper suitable to her husband. And what is it that she does? Is she told by her husband to clean the house, do the laundry, have dinner on the table when he gets home and for the rest keep quiet? Far from it, v.2, "Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing in value." Her husband *trusts* her to help him. He doesn't micro-manage her life. He's not looking over her shoulder at every penny she spends – no! He trusts her to run everything well on the home-front. To say it in modern terms, he gives her the key to the house and the vehicle, access to the bank account and relies on her to manage it all well. Husbands – do you trust your wives? Do you give her room to be the good helper to you she can be? Do you encourage her in taking on responsibility within the home and family life and do you support her in the challenges she faces?

For the good wife is, says v.14, "like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar." She "provides food for her family" on the one hand but, v.16, "She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously." The helper God gave to Adam is not some wall-flower that is just around for her looks. She's not there to be part of the scenery. Nor is she only a mother (as important as that is), but she's there as a *fellow-worker* with Adam, to really assist and help him by managing the affairs on the home-front while he is busy elsewhere subduing the earth – wives, do you see how big a role you play in helping your husband? Are you faithful in running your homes well so that your husband is enabled to do his work? Do you keep abreast of the finances, do you have a mind for organizing and planning ahead? Do you work at improving these qualities?

Much more could be said about the good wife of Proverbs 31 but brothers and sisters understand this: the wife as helper is no mere servant who has a few set tasks but she is co-worker with her husband who knows of great responsibility both within and outside the home, all with a view to helping her husband. Such a wife is indeed a God-send and needed by the

husband. It is even proper, as v.28 says, that “Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.”

Sons and daughters, have you thanked your mother for all her hard work in caring for you lately? And husbands, have you praised your wife recently? Our tendency is to say nothing if everything is going okay. We only say something if things go sour and then we open our mouths to criticize but the *noble husband* of Proverbs 31 opens his mouth to praise his wife for her faithful work, care, and love – are you being that noble husband? Open your mouth to speak positive words of encouragement, to compliment and praise your wife and see the blessing it brings! It’s only then you can really expect a noble wife as a wonderful gift from God.

### Adam’s wife

For notice that after God formed the woman from Adam’s rib, “He brought her to the man.” *God* brought her to the man – the Father in heaven giving away His own daughter! How clear this pattern is: God gave *one* woman to *one* man! The Parliament of Canada can legislate a new definition of marriage that includes one man and one man or one woman and one woman, but in God’s eyes there is only *one* kind of marriage: between one man and one woman, and nothing will ever change that!

And look at Adam’s reaction, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’ for she was taken out of man.” Actually, the Hebrew is stronger, “This *at last* is bone of my bones...!” It’s as if Adam cannot contain his joy and wonder. He’s just been through naming all the animals. He came to realize his own aloneness and that is was not good. He came to understand that though all the animals had their mates and match, he had none. Adam had looked high and low among the creatures for someone who could be a suitable helper, but in the end it took a special creation of God to form the one he needed – the woman! *This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh* – what a wonder! What a miracle! What a joy!

Adam took joy in his wife for he understood the special creation she is – do you understand that too, husbands? Some of you have been married for fifty years. Some for five. Some are about to get married very soon. God created your wife as a special helper fit for *you*.

Long ago woman was formed not from man’s head so as to have dominion over him; nor from his feet to be underneath him as slave, but from his side, from his rib, so as to always be *beside* her, close to his heart. Your wife is a precious gift – be filled with wonder as Adam was! And then together work as man and wife in harmony and love, for the glory of your Maker!

AMEN!

## LIVING THE VOW

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

– Genesis 2:24,25



**W**hat is marriage? Our society has been and still is wrestling with this question – what, really, is this thing called marriage? For a long time already there have been many who consider it a mere formality. To them marriage is nothing more than a “piece of paper” given them by the government or the church, a mere outward token. They have reacted against the public marriage ceremony and the exchange of vows and declared that the piece of paper is meaningless – what counts is the love in your heart for one another. That’s true marriage, they say, and with that rationale they feel free to move in together and co-habit with each other. To them it’s as good or better than marriage. We even call it quite often, “common-law marriage” – they’re living “common-law,” we say.

And on the other end of the spectrum – rather ironically – you have others who are extremely concerned to obtain that official piece of paper

from the government. Homosexuals have been lobbying for a number of years for the “right” to be legally married. For them that paper and the wedding ceremony is a symbol of legitimacy and acceptance. When once they were outlawed, when once they were ashamed to admit their lifestyle in public, now they call in the media to film their wedding ceremony, to be there on the steps of city hall when the Justice of the Peace pronounces them legally married. Some gays and lesbians will do just about anything to be married.

And over against these two extremes we also hear the conservative voices, “Marriage is between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.” Only a few years ago in 1999 the Parliament of Canada upheld this definition in an overwhelming majority. Today they have turned completely around. Many of the same MPs who voted for that definition then would only 6 years later push through same-sex marriage in the House of Commons. A short time ago the conservative view held sway in the court of public opinion, but now it is the leftist agenda and homosexual activists who define what marriage really is. Three basic beliefs exist and right now we are witnessing a sea change in public opinion.

But is marriage a matter of opinion? Is it like choosing the colour of paint for your walls? You may have pink while I prefer blue? We all know that it isn’t. We saw last time that marriage has been instituted by God and so can never be a matter of human opinion but only of divine ordinance. Marriage comes from God and therefore is God’s to define, not man’s.

But even as Christians who take the Bible as the rule and guide for our faith and practice, are we guilty of conducting our marriages according to our own opinion? None of us will give any merit to common-law marriage or homosexual marriage – I don’t have to convince you of that. But are we as husbands, are we as wives consciously living our hetero-sexual marriages according to God’s holy Word? Do we see the deeper meaning of marriage as a way to showcase to the world God’s holy and beautiful covenant with His people?

I proclaim to you this Word of God,

*The LORD displays His own covenant in man’s marriage covenant*

**Marriage is thus:**

- 1. An exclusive covenant**
- 2. An intimate covenant**
- 3. An honourable covenant**

### **An exclusive covenant**

Our text is very familiar to us as the key passage in the institution of marriage. It is even quoted directly in our Form for Marriage, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.”<sup>1</sup> Marriage was established by God when He formed the woman out of Adam’s rib and brought her to the man. That makes marriage a matter of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others – the conservative definition is not just one of several opinions but it is the divine rule of the living God!

And yet it goes deeper still. We’ve seen it several times already that the LORD always acts with purpose and design and so we should expect the same here. Notice the particular manner that God chooses to join together the man and the woman. We read that the man “will be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” This is no casual relationship – here today, gone tomorrow. Man and wife do not have a temporary liaison together but they have a permanent union – they become *one* flesh!

And this union is further characterized by the verb translated in the NIV as, “be united to.” It is perhaps better known to us under the older form, “to cleave” – a man is to leave his parents and cleave to his wife. We used to speak of marriage as “leaving, cleaving, and weaving,” but the poetry has passed us by now. Still, the “cleaving” or “being united to” is a

<sup>1</sup> Book of Praise, p.635

strong verb used often in a covenant context to mean a “binding to” or “clinging to.” It’s a holding-on to the relationship, to the person with whom you have covenanted.

In Deuteronomy 30, after summarizing the blessings and the curses of God’s covenant, Moses implores the people, “Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to His voice, and *hold fast* to him” – literally, “cleave to him.” Being united to God is not a casual thing, not a temporary union that you can take part in today but opt out of tomorrow. No, cleaving means to stick with your covenant partner – in this case God – through thick and thin, to never let go even in troubled times. We sang about it in Psalm 63:3, “I cling to Thee, my strong Deliverer, / And in the shadow of Thy wings / My mouth for joy Thy praises sings / For Thy right hand upholds me ever.” Cleaving to someone means you have a unique bond, a tight relationship, a holy covenant.

You see, brothers and sisters, marriage is a holy covenant between husband and wife, a clinging to each other through all the ups and downs, good times and bad, in mutual dependence upon God. The language of our text is covenantal language. Marriage is even out-rightly called a “covenant” later on in Malachi 2:14. There the LORD rebukes His people. He tells them that He no longer accepts the people’s offerings because, “the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.” From the beginning, God established marriage as a life-long covenant between husband and wife, a covenant that is to mirror and display His own covenant with His people.

That is the greater design and grander purpose of marriage. As husband and wife in holy communion, fellowship and covenant with each other we show to the world something of God’s covenant of love with His people. Scripture often describes God’s covenant as a marriage. The LORD says

in Isaiah 54:5, “For your Maker is your husband – the LORD Almighty is His name.” Later in Jeremiah 3:14 the covenant God exhorts rebellious Israel, “Return, faithless people,” declares the LORD, “for I am your husband.” The very graphic description in Ezekiel 16 shows a marriage between God and Israel that was betrayed by Israel’s unfaithfulness. And how can you understand the entire prophecy of Hosea who had to marry a prostitute and put up with a faithless wife unless you understand that God’s covenant with His people is in essence a cleaving to them, a being united to them, a being married to them?

And this marriage covenant is made the more clear in the relationship between Christ and His church. The New Testament describes it time and again as that of groom and bride. We read about that in Ephesians 5 where the Apostle Paul makes a running comparison of husbands and wives to Christ and the church. Wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ and husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church. And to make the parallel unmistakable, Paul quotes our text in v.31, “‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.” *I am talking about Christ and the church*, he says.

That means, brothers and sisters, that when God formed Eve out of Adam’s rib and brought her to the man; when He thereby established the marriage relationship, then that was not simply a means for man to fulfill the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28 (though it certainly included that!). Nor was it only a means to alleviate the aloneness of man (though it certainly did that too). But its higher purpose, its most profound design was to reflect to all creation how God covenants with His people, how God loves His people! From creation already God had in mind to display in our human marriages how Jesus Christ is one with His bride; how there is a beautiful union and communion, holy fellowship and deep love between God and His wife, the church!



Do you realize this husbands and wives? You cannot boil marriage down to a series of agreements and promises, to obligations and vows, though these are all part of it to be sure. Marriage is meant to reflect something greater yet: God's covenant with His people – is your marriage doing that?

The question is not simply: have you done what was required of you in your marriage vows? It goes much, much deeper. The issue really is this: the way you treat your wife – is that how God treats His people, how Christ treats His church? No husband can sit there with his arms folded and say, "I've done my duty, now it's her turn" – would God ever do that with His wife? In God's covenant, He never stops at the bare letter of the law but He always goes far beyond to give everything He has, to give Himself to His bride – is that how you relate to your wife? The LORD always gives much more to His wife than He demands – can that be said of you in your marriage, brothers?

And wives, the way you act toward your husband – is that how the church acts toward Christ? Sadly in the church you do not have a perfect example to follow, but the ideal for the church's behaviour is spelled out in Scripture – do you give yourself, from your heart, to your husband in exclusive devotion? Do you respect him as the church is called to respect Christ? Do you follow his lead even when it may go against the grain? Submission has its limits, of course. You must not follow your husband into sin against God's commandments but in all other matters do you trust him as your head whom God has given you for your benefit and blessing and yield your will to his?

It's when you understand the parallel to God's covenant that you can understand the exclusive nature of the marriage bond. God the husband has eyes only for His wife – there is no unfaithfulness in God. And God bemoans the fact that Israel so often broke the covenant by committing spiritual adultery with other gods – God's covenant contains two and only two

parties: the LORD and His people. In the same way marriage contains only two parties: the man and his wife.

Our text stresses that in v.24, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." A man has to leave his father and mother, it says. By implication the woman has to separate from her parents as well and join to her husband. Together they form a new unit in society, a new family. But to do that there has to be a measure of separation from other parties, and the LORD mentions here the closest party, the parental home.

Now, this does not mean that Mom and Dad are to be disrespected in any way. On the contrary, we know from the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment that we must honour them. But it does mean that the husband departs from living underneath the authority of his parents to become head of his own home, head of his own wife. The wife leaves the authority of her father's home and joins herself to a new authority, her own husband, and the parental home may not interfere in that relationship. There needs to be a leaving, a break.

In other words, fathers or mothers may not try and cling to the influence and sway they once held over their son or daughter. You know, there's no quicker way to ruin your child's marriage than to usurp the authority of the new marriage covenant. And parents sometimes do this. They simply can't let go of their son or daughter and they end up exercising more influence and authority over their child than does their child's spouse – and that is completely wrong and destructive! It's one thing for parents to care about their child's well-being, to be ready with help and advice, but it's another thing to stick your nose in where it doesn't belong. Over-bearing parents must learn to back off and let their son, let their daughter cleave to his/her spouse.

A daughter may not have a closer relationship to her mother than to her husband, and a son may not rely on his father more than his wife. That

would be a perversion of the marriage institution. It's one thing to go together as husband and wife and seek the sound advice of your parents or in-laws, but it's another to allow your parents *more* respect, more influence than your spouse. You can't run to Mom and Dad on your own when the going gets tough but you must cling to your wife, to your husband and together weather the storms by God's grace. Do not sin by letting a parent come between you and your God-given mate.

And if your parents may not interfere with the marriage covenant, neither may any other party – it is to be an exclusive relationship: one man and one woman in holy wedlock. Just like God has only one covenant partner and insists His people have eyes only for Him, so we must preserve the exclusivity of the marriage covenant. Would we be displaying God's covenant if we took on additional partners or had secret liaisons, or even flirted with members of the opposite sex?

The Lord Jesus underlined this point when the Pharisees challenged him on the issue of divorce (c.f. Matthew 19:3ff). They wanted to tangle Him up about what was proper for divorce and what was not – “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” But the Lord pierces through their trickery and foolishness:

Haven't you read...that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.

*What God has joined together, let man not separate* – let nothing come between you and your wife, you and your husband – you belong together!

It is a sad reality that we know of broken marriages also in the church, perhaps in our own family circle. And that must be a source of great grief for all of us, for as the Lord Jesus also said, “From the beginning it was not so.” It is not God's will that separation and divorce takes place nor does it please

Him in any way. Some marriages we know of have been legally terminated, also in the eyes of God, but others are not beyond repair. Should we not do everything we can, should we not – as couples and congregation – pull out all the stops to preserve these unions? Would we not bring honour to God and joy in our lives by bringing about true reconciliation through the power of the Holy Spirit? Would Christ give up on His church, or the church on her Lord?

Beloved, keep your marriage unions holy, keep yourselves from any impurity and rather enjoy the intimacy God gives you with your spouse.

### **An intimate covenant**

For the marriage covenant is to be one of the closest and deepest human intimacy. Our text says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” The cleaving of a man to his wife finds its highest expression in the physical union of their two bodies, in sexual intercourse or, as we more often say, in making love.

Intercourse is the highest expression of the marriage union, but the world usually turns this completely around. The world teaches and promotes “having sex” as something casual, something easy, something you do lightly, almost on the side. Survey after survey show that teenagers of younger and younger years have sex with multiple boy-friends or girl-friends so that by the time they hit twenty they are sexually well-experienced. Sex is a toy for most worldly people, a self-satisfying pleasure that they will take or get wherever and whenever they like. To say it bluntly, the act of becoming one flesh has become for most merely satisfying personal lust.

And lust is something *every* human being can relate to, even struggles with, because lust arises naturally in our sinful hearts. It's at home there, isn't it? Also as Christians we have a hard time not thinking – even if it's only for a second – lustful thoughts about a man or a woman. And the

temptations are real to indulge our sexual appetite before we become married or even outside of our existing marriage, but brothers and sisters, look at the place God gives to sex – it’s *within* marriage! It is to be the outgrowth, the expression of a loving and abiding communion with each other – not the thing you do by the second or third date!

Note the order – *first* you leave your parental home and *then* you cleave to your wife. That implies that first you establish that personal bond, that relationship – you don’t leave your parental home just like that. And you most certainly do not cleave or cling or covenant with someone at the drop of a hat. No, the cleaving takes place when you have become well-acquainted with that person. You bind yourself to your wife, you establish a firm bond with your husband in holy covenant and *then* you become one flesh – not before! Sex must never be among the first things you do when you are getting to know a member of the opposite sex, but love-making must be the natural result of a well-established basis of communion, of fellowship, of true love for each other. First you enter into a covenant of love with each other and then you enjoy the fruit of intimate union.

For if you invert the order and try to taste the fruit of sexual intimacy *before* cleaving in holy covenant, you will taste only a bitter fruit. That fruit is not yet ripe, not yet ready to be enjoyed. It is sin and as a couple you will experience the shame and guilt of that pre-mature act. Before the face of God you will not have peace and between each other you will know you did wrong – you both were complicit in illicit sex. Young brothers and sisters, don’t pluck the fruit before it is time. Don’t go into the bedroom until you have first been to the church and pledged yourselves to each other in holy wedlock.

And then you may enjoy the fruit of your union! Let’s not overlook that either! God has created sexual intercourse for our enjoyment and pleasure as man and wife. By all means, married brothers and sisters, take joy in making love together! People sometimes think that sex is merely functional,

that love-making serves one purpose only and that is the pro-creation of children. Any pleasure one gets out of that act is just a side-benefit and not really the main point, but brothers and sisters the two are not mutually exclusive! Yes the sexual union of husband and wife is used by God to bring children forth, but it is equally a gift of God for the pleasure and enjoyment of the couple. It’s not, “either...or” but it’s, “both...and!”

Listen to this wisdom inspired by the Holy Spirit in Proverbs 5:18, and understand the sexual metaphors intended:

Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love. Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man’s wife?

Sexual intercourse is not to be a chore but a joy! Not a duty but a delight! It is not to be a selfish act either where only one partner finds his or her own personal satisfaction. It is to be a *mutual* enjoyment, as the entire Song of Solomon makes clear. The whole book speaks about the joyful union and communion of husband and wife. I quote only one passage now from 4:10:

How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice! Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon.

Young people, you often hear the message to stay away from sex before marriage, and that is true. That is God’s will for your life but understand that it’s not to *take away* pleasure but to *preserve* it! God is protecting you from perverting and emptying an act that is so rich and beautiful in the proper context. He is preserving you from *lust* in order to keep you for *love*, true love with your wife, with your husband. What is self-gratifying

and sinful outside of marriage becomes a source of joy and pleasure inside marriage, pleasure without shame, for marriage is also an honourable covenant.

## An honourable covenant

The last verse of our text mentions shame, “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” It is immediately a foreshadowing of dark things soon to unfold for the man and his wife. Very soon in chapter 3 we will read that God’s commandment was broken, their eyes were opened, and they both realized they were naked. Shame will soon fill their lives, and that’s something we all know about. We all have sin, we all are sinners by nature, and we all are ashamed of ourselves before the LORD.

But before man sinned, husband and wife were both naked and felt no shame. In their holy marriage bond, in their intimate union of one flesh, there was no shame whatsoever – there was honour in marriage. Sometimes people think that intercourse even in marriage is a shameful thing, not to be talked about. It is to be done out of necessity and in the prayer that God will forgive its shame. But Beloved, sexual union of husband and wife is not shameful but honourable! It wasn’t nakedness itself that brought the shame, it wasn’t the act of union that brought embarrassment but it was rebellion against God’s commandments. After that Adam and Eve couldn’t look at each other without some sense of shame, and so they covered up their bodies.

But now what has our Lord Jesus Christ done but remove our sin and shame? He has removed our guilt before the LORD so that we need not be ashamed before God anymore – do we then need to be ashamed before our wife or husband with whom we have covenanted in the Lord? In Christ, the union of husband and wife is also sanctified and cleansed from shame! That’s why we find the Song of Songs in Scripture. That’s why we find the Apostle Paul instructing the churches about marriage and sexual intercourse.

Marriage is an honourable covenant and the sexual union of husband and wife has begun to be restored in him as it was in the beginning: *the man and his wife were naked and were not ashamed*. What was lost in Paradise has been recovered on Golgotha. Brothers and sisters you may freely take joy in the spouse God has given you, without shame, for your union is holy and honourable before God, through the blood of our Saviour.

And do we not also in this aspect of marriage reflect God’s own covenant with His people? Of course God has no such physical union with His bride, but does He not have an intimate *spiritual* union with the church? Are we not one with Christ through the Holy Spirit who lives in our bodies just as He lives in Christ? Do we not especially celebrate that in the Lord’s Supper?<sup>2</sup> The coming together of husband and wife in that mysterious union of the flesh shows a glimpse of that mysterious and wonderful union of the Spirit we have with Christ our husband.

We’ve said it before but it bears repeating: every square inch of life belongs to Jesus Christ the Lord. Glorify the Lord, then, in everything. Keep your sexual desire for the one you will marry, and then in your marriage honour God in your bedroom. Before you become one flesh make sure you are one in everything else, and then enjoy each other. Take pleasure and give pleasure in a union without shame.

AMEN!

<sup>3</sup> See the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 28, q/a 76.

## THE TALE OF TWO TREES

*In the middle of the garden were the tree of life  
and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

– Genesis 2:9b



**W**e left off preaching in Genesis last time at the end of chapter 2 where we saw how the LORD instituted marriage. Out of Adam's rib the LORD made a special and unique helper suitable for him, and the two became one flesh – husband and wife.

But before we can go on to chapter three we have to briefly go back and take care of some unfinished business on our part – we have to examine a couple of trees. The events of chapter 3 centre around the forbidden fruit of one particular tree, and that tree is first introduced to us in chapter 2, in our text. So significant is this tree that when Adam and Eve eat from it their whole life changes, their whole world changes and even the whole human race of the future is profoundly affected. Paradise is ruined and the world is perverted when the fruit of that tree is eaten – what sort of tree is this? What are we to make of this tree and its apparent power?

And what about that other tree, the tree of life? It's kind of the silent partner to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – what is its role in the Garden of Eden?

I proclaim to you this Word of the LORD,

*The LORD gives two trees to deepen man's faith in Him*

**The trees reveal:**

**1. The essence of evil**

**2. The essence of life**

## **The essence of evil**

The first thing we should notice is that we are indeed dealing here with *two* special trees, not just one. A lot of people have the misconception that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life are one and the same tree, but our text says very clearly in v.9, “In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” – two trees. Two trees with two different names and serving two different functions: the one has to do with knowledge and the other has to do with life itself.

I think the confusion has arisen in part because after v.9 of our text the Bible never mentions these two trees in the same verse. In fact, after v.9 we don't read a word about the tree of life until the end of chapter 3 and that may give the false impression to some that there is one tree with two names, but really there are two trees.

And it's important to see that because the meaning and significance of these two trees is tied to one another – they work in tandem. Because of what happens in chapter 3, a lot of people concentrate their attention on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They try to figure out precisely what it is about this tree that led to the disastrous results of man being

evicted from Eden. Some wonder whether this tree had poisonous fruit or whether it had power to pervert man's thinking and man's nature, but what many don't see is the relationship between the two trees themselves.

Look again at v.9, “In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” – they *both* were there, side by side! The LORD didn't plant one tree on one side of the garden and the other on the opposite side. He didn't try to hide them from each other, He didn't disassociate them from each other but He put them in the closest possible relationship – together, in the middle of the garden. The tree of life stood a few feet away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That means, brothers and sisters, that when Eve later stands by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil speaking with the serpent, then the tree of life looms silent but large in the background, right behind her.

And both trees stood in the *middle* of the garden, we read. That shows something of their importance – they had a special place in the garden. They occupied centre stage and that made them the focal point in man's new home. And you know that when something is placed in the centre of your home, your attention is immediately drawn there and it won't be long before you come close to investigate. The two trees were the centre-piece of Eden's garden.

So what are we to make of these two trees? There are some who think that they possessed a sort of magical power. That when you ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for example, you would instantly become wise. In fact, that is what Satan says of the fruit in 3:5, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” And along the same lines some believe the tree of life had an independent power to give man immortality – just eat of the fruit and you will live forever! It's the kind of idea you see in so many legends, myths and fantasy stories – think of the fountain of youth whose water would keep a person eternally young.

But there's never any magic in God's handiwork – it may be miraculous, but it's never magical. You see, magic is always understood as a power independent of God, outside of God, in fact as a distinct god in itself – but is there really anything outside of God's sovereign power?

Sometimes we see Satan this way. We see Satan and his demons as a rival of God, more or less on equal footing. We see him as the arch-enemy of God who works day and night to overthrow God's kingdom, and while that is true of Satan and his forces of evil, even they don't exist – not even for an instant – *independent* of God's power and will. Satan likes to think he does and he would have us believe that he's another God who can take the place of the Creator, but the truth is that all power belongs to the LORD God – think of the Lord's Prayer: *for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever!*

And isn't that a balm for our woes, brothers and sisters? How many of us haven't had great adversity, even evil things take place in our lives – some that are downright wicked. Some of us have experienced injury or crippling disease; others, the care of children or relatives that is physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting. Some the sudden and tragic loss of a loved one in the prime of life; others, deep-seated betrayal of trust and love at the hands of one we loved. Where would we find hope if all these things happen by some power outside of God's control? If black magic or satanic power is a second god that is free to do as it pleases no matter what God says, then these hardships have no purpose and our life is futile. It's only when we understand that the LORD allows such things, even sends such adversity with the purpose of blessing us and glorifying Himself, it's only then that it makes any sense. It's only then that it gives us comfort for today and bright hope for tomorrow – because the adversity *can* not, *will* not last forever! Nor will it be for our detriment in the end. The God who controls everything will also work these things out for our good.

These trees are not independent of God. In fact, they're not even from an evil source under God's power, for look at v.8. “Now the LORD God

had planted a garden in the east... And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.” These trees and their fruit are not self-existing trees – God put them there. They're not even super-natural trees. Like all the other trees, they grew out of the ground. Their fruit was good and pleasing to the eye like all the others. Of themselves they were perfectly ordinary trees in the Garden of Eden but what makes them different is that God gives them a specific location with special purposes and unique names.

Their purposes are revealed in part in their names: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. These trees would impart, in some way, both knowledge and life. Now, many people assume that Adam and Eve could gain the knowledge of good and evil by eating from its fruit. Others go further and explain that God didn't actually want them to have that knowledge. God, they say, didn't want man to be like Him, so He put a limitation around that one tree and commanded them not to eat from it.

It's a picture of a God trying to protect His high position and sovereignty, but is that the God of the Scriptures? Is God ever *afraid* that man can be like Him, equal to Him in knowledge and power? And besides, when Adam and Eve did eat of the tree, did they suddenly enter the same exalted state of knowledge and understanding as the LORD God? It's just the opposite, for from the moment they ate of that tree they had a twisted sense of right and wrong, a perverted sense of good and evil, and they were nothing like God.

Rather, brothers and sisters, a better explanation is to see that God fully intended to impart knowledge of good and evil to Adam and Eve not by eating of its fruit but precisely by *not eating* of its fruit! God's commandment in v.16 is crystal clear, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” That fruit didn't contain the inherent power to make one wise but obeying the LORD's commandment would make man wise – that's how true knowledge of

good and evil would be given to Adam and Eve! The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, not eating from a certain tree!!

For if you think of Adam and Eve's situation in Paradise, they knew of no evil. They were created in the image of God and so the inclination of their hearts was always filled with love for God and love for each other – not a bad thought even crossed their minds! They knew their Creator in perfect bliss without any taint of sin because evil had never entered into their world, their environment, not even their heart or mind. You could say that they loved and obeyed God's will naturally and wholeheartedly, without realizing or knowing that you even could disobey God. Much like we don't give any thought to breathing oxygen into our lungs in order to stay alive so Adam and Eve gave little conscious thought to obeying God's will and living in fellowship with the LORD – it just came naturally.

And the LORD's intention with these two trees is to deepen that love by forcing a choice between good and evil. The LORD wants man to develop a greater love and devotion to Him that goes beyond natural inclination to deliberate and wilful choice in the face of an alternative, namely evil. When Adam and Eve are confronted by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which has fruit just as pleasant to behold as any other tree, just as pleasant to eat, then unlike any of the other trees they are confronted with a choice: take the fruit which is ripe and tasty or obey God and leave the tree alone.

This tree was the only tree that made Adam and Eve aware of the possibility of doing wrong, the option to disobey and for that reason God calls it the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He wasn't hiding knowledge from them by forbidding the fruit but He was holding knowledge out to them! He was offering wisdom out to them by making this tree the line in the sand they must not cross. God would teach them the full meaning of obedience by distinguishing it from disobedience, something they had nowhere else in the garden. The LORD wants a heart that rejects every alternative and gives itself fully to Him.

And in this tree, Beloved, we see clearly revealed the essence of evil. I think we often define evil by the negative effects it brings or the consequences it will have. Murder is evil because it harms our neighbour and brings strife between people. Stealing is evil because it robs someone of his possessions and leaves him poor. Rape is evil because it demeans and defiles a person. As long as we can identify the negative outcome we don't have a problem seeing it as evil but when the outcome is uncertain then we're not so sure. When a person withdraws his membership from the church for no valid reason, is that evil? When a person comes to the worship services sporadically or hardly at all, is that sinful? When a person doesn't give of his first fruits to maintain the ministry of the gospel and to assist the poor and needy, is that evil? Things become a little grey for us and we're not so sure whether we can call these things "sins" but brothers and sister in our cloudy thinking we've lost sight of what evil and sin really are!

For look at this tree and this command. There's nothing about this tree of itself that would harm man. V.9 says it already and Eve echoes it later in 3:6, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye..." Its fruit is not poisonous. It is not filled with thorns. Adam will not become sick or diseased from the fruit of this tree – in fact, the fruit will fill his stomach and satisfy his body. The LORD doesn't command man to stay away from this fruit tree because there's evil in the tree but because there's evil in rejecting God's instructions! The LORD wants man to trust God's judgment and simply obey just because God said so. God's point is that even though there's nothing wrong with the tree, God's will must prevail over bodily desire or demonic temptation. Something is sinful, brothers and sisters, not because it brings harm or ill effect, but because it goes contrary to the will of God, the Word of God, the command of God.

And that is radical, compared to how we judge things so often. We downplay sin and evil when we can't see the harm, but we forget how we offend God's majesty and slap God's face every time we disobey His



command. When God in the Bible commands us to be one in faith and unite in the body of Christ, what is it but evil when someone withdraws from that body without just cause? When God commands us to worship Him within the communion of the saints and not neglect the gathering of the church, what is it but sin when we don't come diligently and faithfully? When the LORD commands us to give of our first fruits what is it but evil for us to break His command and hold back our gifts from Him? Let's not fool ourselves, let's not reduce sin and evil in these and similar cases to some murky grey zone where we really don't know what to call it. Going contrary to God's will, breaking God's commandment *is* sin and evil – period!

And the punishment that is attached to sin is death – make no mistake about it! We're dealing here with a very serious matter for if we pluck the forbidden fruit also today, if we indulge in sin without repentance, then we cut ourselves off from the tree of life.

### **The essence of life**

For we need to understand both trees in relationship to each other. The tree of life stands in contrast to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eating of the first tree was the way of eternal life but eating of the second tree was the way of eternal death. When the commandment concerning the tree of knowledge was broken then it became the tree of death – the very opposite of its counterpart that grew beside it.

The contrast is implied in our text v.16, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden” – any tree, including the tree of life! The only tree prohibited was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but Adam and Eve were permitted to freely take from the tree of life. The two trees showed the two paths man could take. Either they would whole-heartedly obey God and pass over the fruit of the tree of knowledge to pluck the fruit of the tree of life, or they would break God's command and choose their own pathway to life – and we know which path they took.

God places before man a test, just as He would do on different occasions throughout history. He later tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Sometime later the LORD tested Israel in the desert as we sang from Psalm 81:6, “You at Meribah / tested and were guided.” And what did God hope to gain by testing Adam or Abraham or Israel? His object was to show them that the way of life was the way of loving Him with all their heart, soul and mind! Abraham was asked the question: *do you love your son more than me? Will you obey my command or your gut instinct?* And Israel in the harsh climate of the desert was asked: *do you trust me to provide your needs? Will you wait patiently until God provides water or will you run back into Egypt or turn to other gods for help?* We sang their response in Psalm 81:10, “By their wilful choice / They my love rejected; / They ignored my voice / Israel did not / Heed what they were taught. / They my law neglected.” The LORD wanted them to love Him from their heart, to flee from all other so-called options, to give themselves wholly to their God and trust His promises even when there seemed no earthly reason to do so. Faith becomes deeper when God is trusted and believed even contrary to human rationale and logic.

The tree of life, Beloved, shows us the essence of life, for why would Adam and Eve take from it rather than the tree of knowledge which stood beside it? Each tree had fruit equally pleasing to the eye, equally good for food. Adam and Eve already had life and they could eat of any tree in the garden, so why should this tree have been of interest to them? It's not as if they would die if they didn't eat from the tree of life, so what would compel them to take its fruit? The forbidden tree was much more compelling because that had to do with knowledge of something they knew nothing about yet by experience – good and evil together. From a human point of view, that tree had something to offer them which they couldn't find anywhere else.

So the only reason they would take of the fruit of the tree of life was because it was set in opposition to the tree of knowledge. The only attraction

would be the consideration that God had forbidden the one tree and attached death to it; while the other tree He had called “life.” Adam and Eve would only desire the fruit of that tree when they had consciously rejected the fruit of the other tree in obedience to God’s command. In other words, brothers and sisters, nothing would have propelled them to eat of the tree of life except for a pure-hearted love for God that yielded to His commandments despite an attractive alternative. The essence of life is love for God, a yearning for the LORD and His fellowship – do you understand that? The essence of death is hatred for God and separation from Him, but the basic stuff of life is a hunger for God’s presence and a thirst for communion with Him – is that the hunger and thirst of your heart?

It’s not enough to know God exists. I’ve heard lots of people say, “Oh, I believe in God” but then ignore His commandments completely – that’s not faith and it doesn’t lead to eternal life. What do you think, brothers and sisters: do you think it is enough to grow up in a Christian family and go to a Christian church and have the basic form of a Christian life? To *say* you believe in God? Do you think that’s the way of everlasting life? If that’s all there is then it is nothing but a hollow shell of religion which will prove empty and meaningless on the last day – don’t let that happen to you.

Life – real living, is to *love* your God, to want nothing so much as to know Him, commune with Him, and have fellowship with Him. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul and mind – that’s living, that’s pure joy! It’s even so as we will sing from Psalm 63, “Thy steadfast love is better far / Than life itself O God my Saviour.” The choice to eat from the tree of life is one born of out the deepest attachment, the highest commitment to the LORD, to love Him enough to obey a command which may not seem to make sense on the surface but just because it was God’s command.

Two trees once stood in the middle of God’s garden paradise on the earth, and in the end two trees will once again stand in the middle of God’s city paradise. Did you notice that in our reading of Revelation 22? In that

dazzling description of the New Jerusalem, the dwelling place of both God and man, we read, “On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.” Two trees again but this time not two *opposing* trees but two of the same – two trees of life! The time of testing is passed and the time of eternal life has come – for all who have access to those trees.

And access comes through faith in the Lamb of God, v.14, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.” *The right to the tree of life* – you know, we forfeited that right in the first Adam when we broke God’s command and violated His covenant with us. Sinners aren’t welcome in eternal life. Those with dirty robes may not take from the tree of life, but we can now wash our robes! And where do we wash our robes? We go to the second Adam who made the right choice where we failed. We run to the last Adam who followed God’s commandment even when it brought Him shame, brought Him pain, even death. We trust in the Son who loved His Father with such a perfect and deep love that we’ll never truly fathom it and yet who was made to hang on the tree of death. We wash our robes in the blood of the Lamb for only He will make them white as snow.

Do you choose for life? Do you want eternal life? Then love the Father with all your heart and follow the Son with all your might and be transformed by the Spirit with all your being. God gave everything He had for you and He gives it still. Won’t you give everything you have for Him?

AMEN!

## COVENANT BROKEN

*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

– Genesis 3:6



We are faced this morning with one of the more mysterious and misunderstood passages in the Bible. It's mysterious because from seemingly out of nowhere sin and evil are injected into God's perfect creation. In seven short even somewhat cryptic verses the Bible describes the introduction of sin into the world – a subject that will be dealt with for the entire rest of the Bible and beyond till the end of time. And the introduction of sin comes via a talking snake to a naked woman who eats fruit from a forbidden tree. It has all the elements of a good fable or myth.

And those mysterious, even strange elements have caused many to misunderstand our text as indeed a myth or metaphor. Unbelievers have long fictionalized the Garden of Eden. You don't have to look hard to find humorous advertisements or cartoons making use of Eve eating the "apple" from the tree. But even some who confess the Name of Christ read our text

and say that this couldn't possibly be historical fact. After all, no one has ever seen a talking snake, right? They conclude that Moses must be using symbols to get across a main point. And interpretation suggests the main point is that sin at some point entered God's good creation and began its poisonous effect, but we don't really know by whom or how it all came about.

But what is overlooked and ignored by all such people is that our text and indeed the whole book of Genesis presents itself as historical reality. Moses didn't receive a vision of signs and figures like Daniel or the Apostle John did. Genesis isn't a book of symbols but it's the book of *beginnings*, historical beginnings of real flesh and blood people: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If, as we've seen, Genesis 1 and 2 are part of the history of God's creation then so is Genesis 3, and what is revealed in our text is not that sin "somehow" entered the world. What we learn is that sin came in through the wilful decision of man.

I proclaim to you this Word of God,

### ***Mankind breaks covenant with God***

- 1. The temptation**
- 2. The transgression**
- 3. The toll**

### **The temptation**

Our text begins with a simple description of an animal, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made." Notice how this straight-forward account fits the same style and pattern as Genesis 1 and 2. There are no elaborate or other-worldly indicators like you find, for example, in the book of Daniel, Ezekiel, or Revelation. There is no reference to a vision. We aren't told here of a four-headed beast, or of

a sudden appearance of a supernatural snake – no, our text speaks soberly of a simple serpent. In fact, it even emphasizes that this beast is part of God's creation for it adds, "more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made." This was just one of God's many *created* animals, one of the many created serpents!

It's for that reason that we should not think of this description in a negative sense. The NIV has translated "crafty" which unfortunately gives a negative connotation. "Crafty" makes you think that the serpent by nature has some evil intentions, that he's a creature always up to no good. But we know already that all of God's creation was declared by the LORD to be "very good" – also the serpent. The Hebrew word for "crafty" is also used often in the Bible to mean "wise" or "prudent." Context will have to decide which way to translate it. For example, Proverbs 14:15 says, "A simple man believes anything, but a *prudent* man gives thought to his steps." So, part of the serpent's nature was to have a good sense of prudence, to be careful in his ways, having an eye for the best advantage in a given situation. You can also think of how the Lord Jesus described snakes when He said, "Be as *shrewd* as snakes and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). He uses the same word as our text.

And then it makes sense for Satan to choose *this* animal to bring forward his temptation. Our text itself makes no mention of Satan but there are indications that something more than a snake is present. When later the LORD curses the snake then He speaks of putting enmity between the snake and the woman, her seed and his. The LORD describes an ongoing battle between the two lines that will end in the crushing of the serpent's head, and that cannot be a reference to physical snakes! The great war in this world is not between people and snakes! It is between God's people and Satan's people, between the LORD and Satan himself. Later on in Scripture this is made perfectly clear when John writes in Revelation 12:9, "The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray."

So Satan takes over and possesses a snake, one of God's creatures. And here we see something of his methods already. He often approaches us carefully, slyly, with prudence. In this fallen world the devil and his demons have much freedom to make use of different people or situations in order to tempt us to sin – watch out for their smooth moves! Though Satan can come with the hammer blow of physical persecution, he more often comes – and that's the great danger in our time and place – with a soft touch, a gentle persuasion to reach us when our guard is down. He comes through the seduction of riches. He approaches with the pleasures of entertainment: television, movies, drama, books, sports, the Internet, alcohol, drugs, sex, each of which in themselves is not evil (just like the serpent was not evil). And though there is much good in most of them, yet they can so easily be used for evil means before we realize it – watch out for the subtle influence of the devil!

And that comes out still more clearly in the serpent's words, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" Now, we're not going to get hung up on the talking snake. To many, this is impossible, but to any who believe that God created the world out of nothing but the power of His Word, why should a talking snake be an issue? It need not have even been miraculous in the Garden of Eden where man and beast lived together in harmony. Is it not possible that Adam and Eve could understand the communication of the animals? Perhaps the serpent didn't speak English or Dutch or Friesian or whatever the human language of Eden was, but could it not be that snakes and other creatures were understood by Adam and Eve as they made sounds in their own language? It all belongs to speculation but let's at least set aside any doubt that the snake spoke words that were clearly understood by the woman.

And those words are ever so sly, "Did God really say...?" The devil is careful. This is no frontal attack. He takes the back-door approach, "Did God really say...?" It may sound at first like an innocent question, but brothers and sisters very few questions are really innocent. You have to ask

yourself, "What's behind the question?" What's the motive behind it and what is the purpose in it? And those two things come into focus when you realize that the serpent is calling into question the Word of God: *did God really say?* The devil knows exactly what God said. He's not looking for information but he's planting a seed of doubt in the woman's mind – *is that what God actually said?* It's an expression of mock surprise.

It's a method that still pays dividends for Satan today. Since everyone today has a copy of the Bible in their possession the question is not, "Is that what God said?" but more often, "Did God really *mean* that?" People can see the words in black and white but egged on by the devil they ask themselves, "Surely God didn't really mean this for us, did He?" Homosexuality can't be evil, many think, so what Paul says in Romans 1 and elsewhere must be a cultural issue, not a permanent command. The Bible says that women aren't supposed to teach or have authority over men in the church, but it can't really mean that, can it? That's so archaic, so draconian – surely that no longer applies to us today, does it?

Brothers and sisters the devil has a field-day with so many believers by raising questions in their minds and sowing doubts in their hearts over the meaning of God's Word. The only way to stand firm is to ground yourself in the true Word of God. How will you know truth from lie if you don't root yourself in the truth of Scripture? If you don't know precisely what it says and what it means? Isn't that how the Lord Jesus defended Himself from Satan?

We read about this amazing work of Christ in Matthew 4. Right after His baptism the Lord is sent into the wilderness to face the devil. It's like a replay of our text only Christ, the last Adam, doesn't have the advantage of the lush garden but He must stand firm in the brutal desert. And there comes Satan with his temptations, out to get Jesus! And how is it that the Lord turns the devil away? Every single time He quotes Scripture! Even when the devil twists Scripture and misuses it the Lord sets him straight with a proper understanding of God's Word and sends the devil packing!

Brothers and sisters, the way to turn away the devil is to know your Bible! Isn't group Bible study an excellent resource for that? Of course, there is no substitute for personal reflection on God's Word but when there is opportunity to open the Bible together with your brothers and sisters on Thursday nights or Wednesday afternoons or other times, will you hold yourself back? Would that not be a great opportunity to deepen your knowledge and sharpen your understanding of God's will? Don't give the devil a chance to loosen you from your moorings but make the most of the opportunities to search the Scriptures and know God's Word inside and out.

And notice that Satan addresses himself to the woman. Again, very subtle, very careful, very clever – he doesn't go to the head of the family but he goes to his wife. He doesn't go to the one who heard God's command directly and in the first place but he goes to the one who heard God's command second-hand, from her husband. He doesn't address them both together but he singles out the woman. Though Eve is not spiritually weaker than Adam yet her position as helper makes her just a little more vulnerable. She doesn't have the same level of responsibility as Adam and the devil homes in on that. His tactic is to divide and conquer.

And the question raised by Satan is successful in getting to the woman. He asks, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" We might think that's a silly question. Of course the LORD didn't say that! But Satan's point is not the obvious answer but the sinister suggestion that *perhaps God isn't so good and so generous as you think He is, Eve!* If the answer to the question were indeed "yes," then God would be made out as a cruel slave master and tyrant who expects man to work the soil but prevents him from eating of those luscious trees in the garden! Satan's wicked implication is that maybe the LORD isn't the loving God He pretends to be and that in itself makes the question blasphemous!

And yet the woman takes the question. She doesn't denounce the serpent's suggestion, she doesn't curse the snake for that rebellious

insinuation, but she dignifies the question by giving a reply and so she begins the fatal transgression.

## The transgression

For we have to understand that Eve didn't sin only at the moment she bit the fruit. That was really only the culmination and climax of the turning of her heart, a turn which begins the moment she tolerates the snake and his evil question about God's goodness.

For what would have been the godly response? What should Eve have done? Should she not have turned away from the serpent and reported this blasphemy to her husband Adam? Adam had been charged with tilling and *keeping* the garden – notice that second verb, to *keep*. You could even translate, "to guard" the garden. It was Adam's primary task to cultivate and *protect* the Paradise of God from any hostile elements and as helper fit for him Eve should have turned to her husband to let him deal with this upstart snake and let him guard Eden.

Instead, she proceeds to engage the serpent, to answer the snake on his own terms. In doing so she distorts the marriage relationship and takes the headship of Adam for herself by dealing alone with the snake. Even more, the woman, who is given charge over the animals together with the man, lets herself be ruled over by an animal. The arrangement of things flips upside down. What we see here, Beloved, as Eve starts her response to the serpent, is a perversion of God's creation order.

And Adam lets it happen. Eve usurps his role and submits to an animal but her husband watches passively – did you know he was standing right there? Look at v.6. When the woman eventually eats of the fruit we read, "She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" – *who was with her!* Adam apparently was standing next to Eve, observing the interchange between the serpent and his wife and he says nothing! He *does* nothing! He allows his wife to take over his headship and allows an animal

to have dominion over his wife! It's a colossal failure to live up to the marriage covenant and God's commandment. By this inactivity and passivity Adam and Eve are already on the verge of breaking covenant with God. The taking of the fruit is really only the icing on the cake as far as the devil is concerned.

It's a vivid reminder for us as husbands and wives to live in harmony together and assist each other in the fight against sin. There's no greater danger to a marriage and a family than when Mom and Dad become divided over against each other. The head of the family and the helper must work as a team in order to guard the family against the wiles of the devil. Wives, seek the direction of your husbands when confronted by temptation. Husbands, strengthen your wives and don't let the world get the upper hand in your family, in your home. Don't fight the battle as individuals on your own but help and encourage each other.

Also, don't let the children divide and conquer either. It's an old trick. If Dad says "no" then the child runs to Mom who unknowingly says "yes." Immediately a wedge is driven between the parents and the child is at risk of being spoiled. Dad and Mom need to speak openly and frankly with each other and develop a united approach not only in disciplining the children but also in how to face the world. Do it together, as one unit in the strength of the Lord.

That Eve's faith in God is weakening is shown not only in the fact that she carries on a discussion with the evil-suggesting serpent but also in the content of her response. She says, v.2, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it or you will die.'" Eve is selective in her answer. She chooses to stay with the devil's focus and speaks only about trees. She refers to the trees in the garden in general and the tree in the middle, but she doesn't mention the name of that tree. If you look back to God's original command in Genesis 2:17 then the LORD spoke

specifically about the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" – after all, there were *two* trees in the centre of the garden, not just the one!

Eve is gravitating away from God's original Word and that becomes more clear in what she says next, "and you must not touch it or you will die." The LORD never said that. God had spoken only of eating the fruit, not of touching the tree. Eve not only dulls the original words of God somewhat but now carelessly adds to His command, making the LORD out to be more severe, more strict than in fact He had been. That's the other way of negating God's Word. You can take away from God's Word or you can add to it, but either way you twist, change, and pervert what the LORD really said. The devil with his question had raised the idea that perhaps God was not everything He claimed to be, perhaps God was not the great Provider and loving Father He portrayed Himself as, and Eve swallowed that idea.

And with Eve in that vulnerable position and seeing no opposition either from husband Adam, the devil advances with a bold strike, v.4, "You will not surely die." Faster than a rattle snake or a king cobra, Satan strikes out at the heart of the woman with lethal force. From raising a question about God's integrity, Satan now pointedly contradicts God's Word in a brazen lie, "You will not surely die." He even takes the very words of God's original command and turns them upside down – *you absolutely won't die, Eve!*

And now comes the reason, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" – do you see how ingeniously wicked Satan is? Now that Eve – and Adam with her – are disposed to thinking less of God than they should, Satan capitalizes on their wavering faith and casts God in a negative light. He paints a picture of the LORD as a stingy God who is holding something back from His creatures so that He can keep it for himself: the knowledge of good and evil! He pointedly calls God a liar and makes Him out to be a great big bully

who wants to keep people in submission to Himself while He enjoys the good things in life. And then Satan holds out to man the possibility of being like God – oh, what a devious and devastating temptation!

And isn't that still the main temptation and the key lie believed by mankind all over the world today? That we can be *like God*, equal to him in knowledge, in power? Later in Scripture we see mankind rallying together to build the tower of Babel as a monument to their own name. Sometime later Nebuchadnezzar exalts himself as god by taking all credit for his kingdom and his power. The Roman Emperors thought they were gods. And is it not the case today man thinks he is in control of his own destiny? Doesn't man think he can solve all the world's problems through science, medicine, and technology? Walt Disney teaches that every person has power within himself and all New Age philosophy – which rules the media in our day – says that all you must do is believe in yourself and you can do anything. You can solve your problems at work, at home, in society by believing in yourself and having faith in humanity. Much of mankind still believes the devil's lie that they can be like God or worse still, be their own god.

And now you can see more clearly that Adam and Eve's sin here is not a light matter. Some might wonder how such a simple mistake could lead to such brutal consequences in this world, but this was not a simple mistake. Eve just didn't take the wrong fruit from the wrong tree one day – it's not even really about the fruit, is it? It's all about trusting God and His Word. Eve gave careful consideration to her actions. We read, v.6, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food, and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it."

Put before her was her covenant God and His Word over against the devil and his word. And the devil's lies are so convincing, aren't they? *Look how good that fruit is! Look how lovely that tree is!* His lies appeal to our physical bodies, to our sense of beauty and even to our intellectual appetite – the fruit was desirable for gaining wisdom, don't forget! How many times

haven't we stood at a fork in the road and the one path looks so good to follow, so easy, so nice, so pleasant and harmless, while the other looks by comparison small, narrow, and rocky? The devil is not an idiot – he knows exactly how to appeal to our basic instincts, but in all these choices let us be fully aware, just as Eve was: it's a choice between God and His promise versus Satan and his promise – whom would she believe? Whom would she follow? Whom will *you* believe? Whom will *you* follow?

Those are really the only two choices in life, aren't they? Sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking that life can be neutral. That you can live life more or less for yourself, and that it's not necessarily against God. But brothers and sisters, either you trust and obey *God* or you follow your desires and trust and obey *Satan* – there is no other alternative. Sin is rebellion against the LORD and carries with it a terrible toll.

## The toll

For sin always has devastating consequences. No one breaks God's commandments in wilful disobedience and doesn't pay a price, sooner or later. We find that toll coming out in v.7, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked." We know they were already naked, of course, but the difference now is that they were *ashamed* of their nakedness. They felt compelled to sew fig leaves together and cover themselves so they could at least bear to look at each other. They were filled with shame.

And that shame, brothers and sisters, is the symptom of a broken relationship, a broken covenant. Soon they will hide from the LORD when He comes, but already now the guilt of their sin pressed upon them. Adam and Eve have broken faith with the LORD, they have turned away from Him and so their own consciences accuse them of rebellion, of sin. They were in a state of revolt against their God and so also the relationship between the two of them was deeply affected. Ever notice that? When your



relationship with God is broken then your relationship with people, even with your spouse, breaks down too? Soon husband and wife will be blaming each other for their own sin.

It's a terrible cost – the misery and shame of sin. Thanks be to God that there was that other Adam who took on our shame! Thanks be to God that Jesus the last Adam withstood all the temptations of the devil, with all his subtlety and with all his force; from the twisting of God's Word in the desert to the subtle trickery of the Pharisees all the way to the outright treachery of a close friend and the full betrayal of His own covenant people as they nailed Him to the cross – the last Adam never fell. He died, but He never sinned, and that work, brothers and sisters, brings us hope in this sinful, shameful world. Because He never sinned He also came back to life and now gives life to all who belong to Him through faith.

Beloved, don't fall for the lies and tricks of the devil – don't live in his service. But believe the truth and the sacrifice of the Christ. And live for Him.

AMEN!

## COVENANT RENEWED

*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'*

– Genesis 3:8,9



Last time we saw how our first parents broke covenant with the LORD. It was not a pretty scene. With full understanding and a whole-hearted willingness, Eve and then Adam chose to believe the word of the devil over against the word of the LORD. They chose to break covenant with God and establish covenant with Satan. Adam and Eve sold their souls to the devil for the illusion that they could be as wise as God.

And our text today describes the aftermath of that diabolical decision. What sort of consequences will there be from breaking God's covenant? What could man expect?

I proclaim to you this Word of God,

*The LORD renews the broken covenant*

**We see:**

- 1. Total depravity**
- 2. Total grace**
- 3. Total victory**

## Total depravity

The devil had promised Adam and Eve that upon eating the fruit their eyes would be opened and they would be like God, knowing good and evil. They were in for a rude awakening. We finished with that last time, v.7, “Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized they were naked...” Their eyes were opened, alright, that was true enough! But what they saw was not good and evil *as God knows them* but what they saw was the evil that now lay within their own heart!

Before, they had only *heard* of evil from a distance, so to speak, as a possibility they had been warned against. They had only truly known in an intimate way goodness and innocence but now they certainly knew also of evil by experience, a bitter and regretful experience! That’s totally different than God. God understands evil from afar, as something outside of Himself, but Adam and Eve understood it up-close and personal, from the inside out, because they had *become* evil. They were naked and they were *ashamed*.

Now, on the face of it, this is a strange result. The LORD had clearly warned Adam that eating of the tree would result in death but all we read here is that it resulted in an awareness of their nakedness – how does that fit together? Is being naked the same as death? Is being naked of itself sinful? We know that’s not true because before they sinned Adam and Eve were naked and there was no death, no ill effect. The difference now is that Adam and Eve are *ashamed* of their nakedness. And shame, brothers and sisters, is the result of *spiritual* death. Just as the LORD had warned, something died inside of Adam and Eve the moment they broke covenant with their God.

For what is shame? Shame is a sense of self-loathing, to be acutely aware that you have defied a certain standard and to hate yourself for that. Like when a student cheats on his test at school and later on regrets it. He is ashamed of his action, wishes he had never done it, and even hates himself for doing it – that’s shame. It’s triggered by guilt, by the awareness that you have done wrong even though you knew better, even though you could

have and should have acted differently. Shame is brought on by guilt and guilt is brought on by breaking faith with God, by walking away from His commandments and going your own way.

And that, Beloved, is the essence, the core of death. The stopping of the heart that beats in our chest and the cessation of our breath is one thing, and it’s terrible, but the stopping of communion with the LORD, the cutting off from the Spirit of God, that is much, much worse! And the moment Adam and Eve broke covenant with God is the moment they truly died inside. That communion was severed, that harmony between man and his God was instantly gone. The immediate result was an overpowering sense of shame which later on turned into fear, angst, pain, hardship and eventually physical death as well.

But *spiritual* death had taken hold of Adam and Eve immediately. From a life of true communion with the LORD in His covenant of love they entered into an enslavement under Satan in his covenant of hate. Mankind became totally depraved. All his being, all his thinking, all his nature became infected with evil. That is evident first from their sense of shame – they were no longer comfortable in their own skin. Their original holiness and righteousness had been shattered so that they no longer understood, much less wanted, to do what was right.

That comes out in their next action, v.7 still, “so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” We might think, “Well, what’s the big deal? They assemble some make-shift clothes and cover themselves up – wouldn’t we have done the same thing?” No doubt we would have but then we too would have made the same mistake they did – they dealt with the *effects* of their sin and not the sin itself! Their major concern at that moment was not that they had just broken covenant with God; not that they had offended His majesty; not that they had lost the most precious thing in life but what had their attention was their overwhelming sense of shame and how to make themselves feel better.

They don't even think at all about *God* right away. Their first action is not to fall on their knees and cry out for mercy but it is to cover up their sin, cover up their shame. They don't think at all how they have broken God's commandment but they are worried sick about their own feelings and they deal with that first.

And that's a pattern in our human nature that hasn't really changed, has it? So often when we sin our first thought goes to the consequences. If we lie to someone then we worry that they will discover that lie and be angry with us. How often are we first smitten with guilt before the LORD that we have broken His commandment? We busy ourselves trying to cover up the lie, to do damage control, to see to it that it never gets discovered.

We sew our own fig leaves together, don't we? If we speak ill about someone and defame their name; if we tear down their reputation, do we not try to justify ourselves by claiming that it is all true? Do we not try to appease our own conscience and cover up our own shame by insisting that all we have said is true? We have become experts at covering up our shame but brothers and sisters it amounts to nothing more than a pathetic apron of fig leaves that cannot hide our guilt and shame before the LORD God – He sees right through our thin and ill-fitting disguises!

Man tries in vain to hide his shame but his depravity comes out still more vividly in what happens next, v.8, "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD among the trees of the garden." Man, who was made in the image of God; man who was appointed king over all creation to rule it for God's glory, now runs away from God and hides from Him! And why does he hide? Adam explains in v.10, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" – Adam and Eve were *afraid* of God! They had tried to hide their shame and for a moment they felt the fig leaves were doing the job, but the second God approaches them, they run for cover! Leaves won't do it anymore – they run

for the trees, the biggest cover they can find, for now they are deathly scared of God! It's a horrendous development. Man who was the object of God's love and who loved God in return now has nothing but dread of God in his heart! Man's nature has turned from white to black.

And man is still running away from God, still trying to hide, isn't he? Don't we do that ourselves when we fall into sin? We build for ourselves a thin covering for our shame and then we simply keep away from God. We don't go to where He is – you ever notice how you stop praying when you fall into sin? When you for a time do not repent but rather hang on to your sin, how is your prayer life? Perhaps you keep up a show in public or in your family for the sake of appearances but there in private, on your knees at night, do you go to the Lord in sincerity of heart? Do you speak with Him about the sin in your life? When we revel in our sin our prayer life shuts down and we keep away from heaven's throne room. We might even keep away from church too because in the assembly of God's people we come too close to the Lord and our consciences can't handle that. Watch out, brothers and sisters, that you're not on the run from the LORD. Do you think He won't find you?

In a moment of time man passed from a state of excellence to a state of evil, from harmony to horror, from paradise to brokenness – there is no good left in man. Adam and Eve can't stand to be in God's presence and they also show hatred for each other – did you notice the blame-shifting going on? When the LORD starts asking questions, Adam points away from himself with two fingers, v.12, "The woman you put here with me – she gave me fruit from the tree and I ate" – do you see that? At the very end he is forced to admit that, yes, he did eat from the tree but who does he blame? Does Adam take responsibility? No, he blames his wife, "The woman – she gave me fruit!" – does that sound familiar, brothers and sisters?

But Adam's depravity goes deeper for he blames not only his wife but he dares to blame also the LORD Himself: "The woman *You* put here with

me...” Do you see the audacity of sin? The brazenness of our fallen human nature? Not only does Adam point the finger at another human being but he brashly blames God for his own sin, while he comes out smelling like a rose! Brothers and sisters we have here a picture of an unrepentant, ice-cold, self-righteous heart – and we all can relate, can’t we? The woman is no better than the man for she will shortly do the same thing in blaming the snake, but does anyone fall on his knees and take the blame? We all by nature know exactly how to pass the buck, don’t we?

Sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking that *admitting* our sin is the same as repentance, but the two are not identical. Adam and Eve both admitted their sin but found the fault in someone else. There was no change in their heart, no turn in the direction of their life!

How different was the response of Job later on. Job, who had less privileges than Adam and Eve in Paradise did, who suffered a tremendous amount *more* than they did but yet did not break covenant like Adam and Eve did, nevertheless when he is approached by the LORD to give account of his actions gives this truly meek reply, Job 40:4, “I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth.”

And when the LORD goes on to remind Job of God’s righteousness and inscrutable wisdom, then Job humbles himself still further, chapter 42:3, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me...(v.6)...Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” – that, brothers and sisters, is repentance. All fingers are withdrawn from others. We don’t point to our wife or our husband, we don’t point to our friends, we don’t point to the office bearers or anyone else but we say to the LORD, “I have done wrong and I am fully to blame. I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” And if you can’t say that, then understand, Beloved, that you have not repented and you are still living in broken covenant with God.

Man’s situation is dark and dreary. There is no good left in man, nothing which desires to please God, nothing which *can* please God. Man

doesn’t even want to go to God but runs away in fear. Our total depravity can only be overcome by God’s total grace.

## Total grace

For look at how the LORD responds to man. Spiritual death had set in already and man shows his ugly nature. The LORD had threatened death as punishment for their sin – all Adam and Eve could expect was instant and complete death to the max. It would have been perfectly righteous of God if He had sent fire down from heaven to destroy Adam and Eve and burn up the earth. No one would have been surprised had the LORD come with His wrath into the Garden of Eden – why do you think Adam and Eve were so afraid? They knew their guilt, they knew the punishment and they knew God does not lie or go back on His Word, so death and destruction must await them.

But we don’t read about fire. And we don’t read about consuming wrath. Instead we are surprised to read that the LORD comes walking into the garden, just like He always used to! And even when Adam and Eve hide then the LORD does not lash out in anger as expected but, v.9, “The LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’” The first word is not a word of judgment but a word of grace, “Adam, my son, where are you?”

For we must understand that the LORD said these words not for His benefit but for Adam’s. The LORD was not on a quest for information – He knew exactly which tree Adam was hiding behind. Nothing is hidden from God, but now God in His mercy reaches out to Adam! Though Adam and Eve had rebelled and broken the covenant, though they had separated themselves from His love, though they wanted to be wiser than God, though they had hated the LORD and loved Satan and even now were cowering in the bushes in dread of their Creator, yet the LORD calls out to them, “Where are you? Come out from there. Come into my presence, I want to speak with you.”

Isn't that amazing, brothers and sisters? Man wants nothing to do with God and has thrown Himself into the clutches of death, but God still comes looking for man and brings him back into the reaches of life – *come, talk to me, Adam!* That's how the LORD works, through grace that is super-abounding, through grace that blows your mind away!

Though we hate Him by nature yet He still comes to you and me and still calls after us. If it were up to us we'd be out there with the world, gnashing our teeth at God from the bushes, but because of His mighty grace we are gathered here today as His children – you belong here for one reason only: God's grace in your life. If you had nothing else in life to thank the LORD for (and we each have countless blessings), this one fact would be enough – you have peace with God by grace alone.

And that grace is made still more clear in v.15 where the LORD curses the serpent. The LORD does not excuse man for his sin (we'll see their punishment more another time, the Lord willing) but through the process of His questioning God traces the origin of sin to the rightful party – the serpent.

Again it's worth pointing out that these questions asked by the LORD are not a fact-finding mission for God's own knowledge, so that He can figure out exactly what took place. The LORD knows how it all went down. Instead, He wants to make it clear to Adam and Eve how things came about. Remember that at this moment they were still in league with Satan who had possessed the serpent. They had made a covenant with the devil and so they were on friendly terms with the serpent. In order for the LORD to break up that devilish covenant and restore man to the covenant of love with Himself, He had to make it perfectly plain to them that it is the serpent who is their true enemy. Moments before they had believed the lie of Satan. They had trusted him but now God wants them to see that the serpent had led them down the wrong path, that he deceived them, that he is the enemy who lies at the source of their shame, their misery, and their fear. Adam and Eve must see that clearly for the only way back into God's covenant is to break covenant with Satan.

And that's why the enmity is such a gift of grace! That sounds strange at first, for enmity means that one is against the other. Enmity is strife, it is to be at logger heads with someone else, to be constantly in friction with and even out rightly hostile towards another – how can that be a blessing? But look at v.15. In v.14 the serpent as an animal is cursed by being put into a position of utter humiliation. Then in v.15 the LORD addresses the evil spirit who had used the serpent, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers” – the LORD says, “I will do that!” By nature it is not there. By nature we humans gravitate toward sin and the devil's ways, but God says, “I'm going to put a stop to that!” Satan had caused enmity to sprout between man and God but immediately God turns the tables and puts enmity between His people and Satan – is that not an undeserved blessing and total grace? He keeps us away from the camp of the Evil One!

And yet sometimes we forget or ignore this gift, don't we? It can become tiring to always feel different from the world, to always be set apart a little bit, to always be regarded as outside the mainstream – you ever feel sick of that? When we start feeling that way then we edge over a little closer to the offspring of the serpent, that is, the unbelieving world who are still in covenant with Satan and not with God. We start to cozy up to the world. We participate in their forms of entertainment, we adopt their way of life by indulging in materialism or luxury or idle pursuits for our own pleasure. We become close friends with unbelievers and even start dating them or become business partners with them – brothers and sisters are you aware that *the LORD* put enmity between us and them? It's not the church who did this and it certainly isn't there naturally – it's God's gift of grace – are you thankful for that? Do you make every effort to maintain that enmity as well?

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting in any way that we no longer interact with unbelievers. Not at all, for we need to let our light shine before men, but that light cannot shine when we become like them,

when our light is dimmed further and further and we become as dark as the world. Spreading the gospel in word and deed to those outside is good and necessary but that never means joining them in their way of life. It is just as James writes in chapter 4:4, “Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” Evangelism and romance don’t mix. Partnering with unbelievers makes a mockery of that enmity. Are you mindful of that enmity and are you thankful for it? Do you know what it does? It keeps us from slipping back into league with Satan, back into his demonic covenant. We’ve been there once – let’s never go back.

And we can’t afford to be there. For the devil and his offspring will be crushed in the LORD’s total victory.

### Total victory

That victory is signalled already in v.14 where the serpent is cursed directly. Notice that Adam and Eve themselves are not cursed directly but the instigator of their rebellion *is*. To be cursed is to be cut off from God and marked for eternal destruction.

And as a sign of that, the serpent will crawl on his belly and will eat dust all the days of his life. Now, some people get side-tracked with the question of whether or not the serpent had little legs and feet before this – like a giant millipede or something. I’m not going to get into that issue because it serves little purpose and is really unanswerable. The Bible doesn’t tell us. The point is not whether or not the serpent crawls for the *first* time but that his crawling takes on *new significance!* It becomes now a sign that he is under God’s curse! It is a symbol of his humiliation. Later in the Bible we read of how God’s enemies will lick the dust at the feet of His people. We might say today that, “another one bites the dust.” Slithering in the dust points to the utter defeat of the evil serpent, Satan himself.

And then the LORD brings that out most pointedly in v.15b, “He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.” It’s a picture of conflict. The godly line of the woman versus the ungodly followers of Satan; they will be in constant enmity, struggle, and battle.

Brothers and sisters, let’s understand that the life of a believer is not a bed of roses – we can expect to be snake-bit from time to time. You know what happens when a poisonous snake bites. It’s instantly painful and potentially fatal. You have to be rushed to hospital. The devil is in this fight to win and the poison dripping from his fangs is indeed lethal – we can expect suffering and pain. We can expect a backlash – even a violent backlash from the unbelieving world when we show ourselves to be followers of the LORD.

The Lord Jesus Himself experienced this. Though He was *the* Offspring of the woman *par excellence* and though He died for the sins of man, yet the offspring of the devil hated him. He did them no wrong but they couldn’t stand Him. And the serpent himself came and nipped at Christ’s heels in the desert of temptation. He struck awfully close through the hand of hostile crowds that twice wanted to put him to death. He finally sank his fangs into him through the betrayal of Judas and ultimately sent his poison to Christ’s heart in His execution on the cross. The life of the covenant child is no different than that of the covenant mediator. The enmity is there as a blessing but sometimes we experience the pain and suffering of a snake bite.

And yet it is only temporary. The snake’s bite is never fatal, for even though Satan latched his fangs onto the Lord Jesus Christ, yet at that very moment, despite all outer appearances, the Lord crushed Satan’s head. Satan did his best to ruin the Christ but because Christ kept covenant with His Father in heaven perfectly, Satan had no power over him. Because the last Adam never believed the lie of the serpent and never entered into covenant with him, the death He died could never be permanent. He rose

from the grave, over-powering Satan, overcoming the power of sin, removing the sting of death, and sealing the victory for God's people once and for all.

The serpent's head has been crushed. And that means that every snake bite we get in the heel; every ounce of suffering we endure now as offspring of the woman, as followers of Jesus; the effects of every drop of poison will be reversed. The antidote has been given us in the blood of Christ. Its healing can be felt already today. And full restoration is assured on the day Christ Jesus returns.

That's God's grace, pure and simple and over-powering – in Christ He renewed the covenant we broke. Will we then befriend that treacherous serpent? Let's be what we are in Jesus: friends of God.

AMEN!

## CONSEQUENCES

*Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become  
the mother of all the living.*

– Genesis 3:20



Last time we heard about the enmity which the LORD placed between the woman and the serpent, between the followers of God and the followers of Satan. That antithesis, that ongoing struggle – though ultimately a blessing because it keeps us away from joining with the devil – will not be easy. The serpent will bite the heel of God's people and cause considerable anguish and suffering. And while our great encouragement is God's promise to crush the head of Satan by the Seed of the woman, yet so long as this present life continues we can and we must expect to be attacked by the devil. Every day we still need to pray, "Deliver us from the Evil One."

And yet this enmity is not the only result of Adam's sin. We have not just gained an enemy in the devil but *all* of God's good creation has turned against us. Where once there was blessing now there is curse and everything around us – also everything *within* us – lies under God's judgment for our sin.

I proclaim to you this Word of the LORD,

***The LORD imposes the consequences of man's sin***

**1. The gloom**

**2. The grace**

**3. The gratitude**

**The gloom**

After the LORD curses the serpent He then turns to the woman and the man. Very clearly the LORD is acting as Judge. He condemns the serpent and then moves on to pronounce sentence over the woman and the man, and notice that He does that to each separately.

We might have expected God to deal with the man and the woman as one unit since they are husband and wife. After all, the LORD had earlier brought them together and declared them to be one flesh, and yet He treats them separately. Each one has his own responsibility before the LORD and must personally answer to God for his own actions – that's something for us to remember, brothers and sisters. When it comes time for Judgment Day then there is no hiding behind the skirts of our wife or behind the shoulders of our husband: we each will give an account to the LORD.

Sometimes a spouse quietly follows her husband or his wife into sin, saying nothing. No one likes to upset the apple cart, right? He or she stays in the background and allows sin to carry on in the home because they don't want to rock the boat but brothers and sisters if you don't rock the boat now your boat will be sunk in the storm of God's wrath on the Last Day. Loving your husband or wife never means enabling him or her to live in sin but it means seeking help to put a stop to that sin.

The LORD's word to Adam's wife is not very long but it sure is

hauntingly powerful, isn't it? Every woman here can relate to this, especially every wife and mother, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children." Any sister here that's given birth can give her personal testimony that God's judgment is still in effect. Even with all the medical advances of today, child birth remains painful and difficult. We're still dealing with the consequences of our sin in Adam.

Perhaps it is good to clear up any misconception about sin, forgiveness and consequences. We are fond of saying, "Forgive and forget." That means that when you forgive someone their sin, you don't bring it up anymore and you don't talk about it anymore. And to a large extent there is truth in that – past sins that have been forgiven should not be brought up quickly or easily. But the words of our text show that being forgiven doesn't necessarily take away the *consequences* of our sin.

As we saw last time, by not coming in condemnation the LORD had shown mercy to the man and his wife. He had cursed the serpent and given the promise of deliverance through the Seed of the woman, God's very own Son. He had brought *forgiveness* to Adam in the promise and yet the LORD does not take away all *consequences* of their sin. Everything does not instantly turn back to the way it was before! When we turn to Him in sincere repentance and faith, the LORD forgives us our guilt but the *results* of our sin are not always – not even usually – erased in our lives, and that makes us, personally, ever *conscious* of our sin. We remember it like it was yesterday. The LORD no longer holds us guilty for that sin, and we often must learn to forgive ourselves too, but the truth is we often suffer the consequences of our own foolish actions.

Now, the same is true for others who sin and we must be considerate and bear in mind those consequences and their struggle against sin. For example, when someone repents from the sin of drunkenness then we give him our support. We help him re-integrate into the church. We help strengthen his faith through prayer and Scripture reading, but throughout



it all we remain acutely aware of his sin. You don't then throw a party and put out all kinds of booze do you? You won't offer him a beer, will you?

Or if someone is genuinely sorry for his sexual sin then we must assist him and gently restore him in the body of Christ, but we must never leave him alone in a vulnerable situation. We want to lead him *out* of sin, not *into* it, right? Being forgiven our sin does not mean we no longer have a weakness in that area but it does mean we have the strength of the Holy Spirit to overcome the temptation. And God's people must help each other avoid, flee, and resist those sins. Forgiving people their sin does not mean sweeping it under the carpet but it means not counting it against them anymore and helping them out of it. Instead of forgive and forget we are called to forgive and *facilitate* the rehabilitation of our brother or sister.

Now the first consequence of the woman's sin is well-known – pain in child-bearing. That certainly means the increase in physical pain but it also includes the emotional pain of the heart for the word can also be translated as “sorrow:” “I will greatly increase your sorrow in child-bearing.” And then it refers not only to the time of pregnancy and delivery, though that is certainly included, but the Hebrew word for “childbearing” also includes the *conception* of that child. So the punishment of the woman affects the entire process of the begetting of children. From first to last, the woman will experience pain and sorrow, and doesn't every woman know of that burden? From the first menstrual cramp to the moment of birth to the last hot-flash and beyond, the process of bearing children is filled with grief, sorrow, and pain.

And that's just if life follows its *normal* course. For some there is under this general judgment the added sorrow of not receiving any children, or receiving a smaller number than hoped for. The sorrow of failed conception is not unknown among us and how many tears haven't been shed over that loss? You know, it's remarkable that in the book of Genesis we find so many women struggling with the sorrow of *infertility*. Think of Sara who

was barren for so long. Think of Rebekah for whom Isaac had to specially pray. Think of Rachel who was so filled with sorrow and grief that she cried out to Jacob, “Give me children or I will die!” (Genesis 30:1). There are also those who die in child-birth, to be sure, but the greater sorrow was to have no children at all. The woman lives with the consequences of her sin, and it is miserable.

The other consequence is no better (v.16), “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Now, there's been a lot of discussion over the meaning of this verse. Is this the woman's *sexual* desire for her husband? As if to say, though the woman will know much grief in child-bearing, yet she still will desire sexual union with her husband? But if that is the case, it's hard to see how that is a form of punishment for either the woman or the man. Isn't that what they were created for in the beginning? Does anyone here consider a wife's sex-drive a bad thing?

A better interpretation is to see this not as a *sexual* desire but rather as a desire to *rule* over the husband, for then it makes more sense with the next phrase, “and he will rule over you.” You could also translate with the word “but:” “Your desire will be for your husband *but* he will rule over you.” The woman will – contrary to the way she was created – want to dominate her husband but the husband will instead dominate her.

Look with me at Genesis 4:7. Here we have an example of a more-clear text helping us understand a less-clear text, for the same two verbs are used here. The LORD says to Cain, “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it *desires* to have you, but you must *master* it.” *It desires to have you*, that is to rule over you, *but you must rule over it*. In the same way the wife will want to rule over her husband but he will rule over her. It's a distortion of the creation relationship between husband and wife. Eve had already once usurped Adam's role as head and she would continually want to have that position again, but in the end her husband would rule over her.

That's a forceful word, "rule." Gone is the pledge to "love and to cherish" and in its place is the judgment, "to rule and to dominate." That glorious and harmonious fellowship of husband and helper is twisted and perverted by our sin. From this point forward there would ever be an inner tension between husband and wife, a clash in the most personal relationship we know.

Many people consider these words only as they apply to the woman, as if this is only her burden to bear. But let's not forget that *Adam* is at the same time affected here. A lot of people think of Adam's ruling over his wife as simply God's punishment over the woman, but did you know it is equally punishment over the man? Man was created as head over his wife but not to dominate her, not to rule her against her own will. The picture in Genesis 3 is master and slave but it was not so from the beginning!

Woman was created as helper, not servant. And when Paul commands the husband who has been redeemed in Christ then he doesn't say, "Rule her," but, "Husbands, *love* your wives, just as Christ loved the church." The command to wives is to submit, but the command to husbands is to love and guide, not lord it over their wives. Which Christian husband finds any pleasure in keeping his wife subservient? Ruling your wife with an iron fist is a matter of God's punishment, but if you've been freed from that punishment, won't you be head of your wife with the utterly self-less and sacrificial love of Jesus? Then your authority will not hurt and crush but it will heal and build-up!

These are the consequences of sin for the woman – a life filled with pain and sorrow around her central role as helper for her husband. There will be disharmony in her most intimate relationship. The special and unique task of the woman in childbearing is made terribly burdensome and her marriage is made difficult. That's the powerful effect of sin. That's something that women right around the world live with each and every day.

And the man's punishment is equally filled with gloom. Just as the woman's special calling is put under the curse, so is also the man's special

calling. The LORD says, v.17, "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life." *Cursed is the ground because of you.* Man's calling was specifically to till that ground, to cultivate the soil and thereby have dominion over the earth and all animals, but now that ground will in no way cooperate. Just as the woman will have pain in bearing children, so the man will have pain in scratching out a living from the earth. Instead of the blessing of plentiful crops the man will have to contend with thorns and thistles. Instead of a pleasant tilling of arable soil it will be back-breaking work by the sweat of the brow.

And is that still not the case today, brother and sisters? It is true that we have many technological advances. Tractors, implements and heavy machinery do most of our slugging. Computers, medical advances, and household appliances do much to ease the burden of this curse, but even with all that, you still have to work hard, don't you? And the earth doesn't easily give of its fruits, does it? Farmers still have to spray for bugs and weeds each season. If the weather is off even a little at the wrong time, a whole season can be ruined. Which farmer will say it's an easy business?

But other jobs are the same. If you work in manufacturing then the work is tiring and laborious – and that's when things go well. It doesn't take much for things to break down or for workers to make mistakes. And those in management positions dealing with employees and guiding the business along – will any of you say your job is, "no sweat?" There is the constant pressure of drumming up more work, the solving of employee problems, the worry of having enough funds to write out pay-checks, the chasing down of unpaid bills. Nothing comes easy in this life.

Sin has its tentacles spread out into every facet of the life of the man just as it does into the life of the woman, until it brings us right back to the very soil from which we were taken, "for dust you are, and to dust you will return." Every day the obituaries in the newspaper are filled with people returning to dust – seniors, middle-aged, women, children, even babies.

Not one day goes by without death claiming another person. We're born in pain, we live in pain and mostly we die in pain too. It's enough to leave a person utterly depressed.

This life on its own is surely miserable and gloomy – until we see the way out in the light of God's grace.

## The grace

For as oppressive and gloomy as these judgments are, they are actually much lighter than we deserve, aren't they? For notice now that these are not the automatic consequences of our sin but something imposed by the LORD. We find this throughout our text in the LORD's response, v.16, "I will greatly increase your pains" – *I put this punishment upon you*. And again to Adam He says, "Cursed is the ground" – the LORD puts that curse there.

It is not the case that the LORD approaches Adam and Eve and says to them: "These are the automatic consequences of your sin. This is the punishment I threatened you with beforehand, the punishment you knew of in advance." Imagine for a moment that the LORD had done that. He had every right to do so. The punishment He had threatened was simply this: "On the day you eat of it you will surely die." The *automatic* punishment for Adam and his wife was not increased pain in child bearing or in making a living, but it was death, plain and simple. And yet *that* punishment is not imposed – at least not fully!

We are not used to seeing our burdens in that way, but when we stand back and analyze what is going on here then we must see that the LORD gives to man much less than he really deserves. Notice in v.14 how God directly curses the serpent, but nowhere does He directly curse the man or the woman, though that is exactly what they deserved! The *ground* is cursed on account of man, and a woman's own body will betray her with pain and sorrow, but no curse falls on the head of either one, and in that, brothers and sisters, there is overwhelming grace! They should have been terminated

instantly! They should have been wiped off the face of the earth! The human race should have been destroyed in the wrath of God, but they are spared! They are left standing. They are even promised redemption in the crushing of Satan and they are brought back into fellowship with their God! Can you fathom this love of the LORD, Beloved? I can't.

The punishment is heavy and yet despite it, salvation will come! Instead of death the very judgment includes the promise of life: "with pain you will give birth to children." We tend to focus on the pain and sorrow and feel gloomy about it. And it is miserable, to be sure, but do you also see the miracle here, brothers and sisters, that children will in fact *be born* to Adam and his wife? The womb should have been closed, the heart should have stopped, the lungs should have collapsed, but the LORD says, "Giving birth will cause you much pain, but you will give birth!" There is much hope in this judgment, much optimism for instead of eternal death for the human race, life will spring forth!

And the same happens with the man. The earth will give him all kinds of grief as he toils over it, but it *will* produce food for him! "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food," but at least you will eat your food! You can actually look at God's judgment over man as mild by comparison to what we really deserved. On the one hand God's punishment makes us experience the bitter brokenness of life in all that we are and do. Every day we feel the weight of what we have done in Adam, the burden of our transgression, and yet through the midst of it, life does go on! The Seed of the woman will arise and indeed has arisen in Jesus Christ to crush the head of the serpent. In Him we now begin to feel the reversal of that judgment.

We can't go into it in detail right now, but did you notice how Paul shows us the freedom from the curse which we have in Christ? The marriage relationship cleansed by His blood and renewed by His Spirit is no longer one of acrimony and tension but one of willing submission and sacrificial love. The parent-child relationship in Christ is no longer

one where children disrespect their parents and fathers exasperate their children, but it is one of respect and loving discipline. The employer-employee relationship (master-slaves) as Christians is not filled with strife but is filled with care, concern, and heart-felt service. Christ has taken on our curse and begins to remove also the consequences of our sins. Every-day life is different in Christ!

And, when you think about it a little further, doesn't God's judgment also have this gracious effect that it drives us into the arms of our Saviour? Imagine that, though we were spiritually dead and condemned to eternal hell, life was smooth and easy. Imagine if, though we had no peace with God, all things in this life went along swimmingly, with no pain or sorrow – how fast would we seek out Christ our Saviour? We're already slow as it is! But when we experience the effects of our sin, when the brokenness of life mounts upon us, when the cycle of death and decay hits us square in the face, we go to the only source of help there is – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

That's also why we read Romans 5. Suffering as a child of God brings about a positive effect, v.3: "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us..." It is even so that we can *rejoice* in our sufferings because God uses them to bring us closer to Himself. Is that not a blessing for which we can be thankful? We once cut ourselves off from God altogether but now – through the instrument of suffering – the LORD draws us more and more back unto Himself. Should we not be filled with gratitude even in the midst of our sorrow?

## The gratitude

Adam saw it that way. For the first time since God revealed His grace and mercy in cursing the snake and in easing up on man's rightful punishment, we read of Adam's reaction in v.20: "Adam named his wife 'Eve,' because she would become the mother of all the living."

It doesn't sound like much, at first. We're used to calling her "Eve" and maybe we think nothing of this little verse. But it shows that Adam was listening to the LORD and understood the mercy granted him. Adam and Eve had brought upon themselves *death* by their actions, but the LORD had intervened to promise them *life*. Eve had no right to give birth, no right to produce offspring for she had died before the LORD, but Adam understood and believed God's promise: she would *live*! A saviour would come out of her line! She would not give birth to a race destined only for eternal death but she would be the mother of all the *living*! From Adam and Eve would come a people who would truly be *alive* in the LORD, who would know of eternal life through the blood of Christ Jesus!

Before, he had called her "woman" in response to God's gift of a wife. Now he calls her "Eve" in response to God's gift of life – *eternal life* for him and all his descendants who believe in her great Seed! Adam entered a state of gloom and suffering like he had never known, and yet he entered it in faith. He entered it in thankful hope – *she shall be called 'Eve!'*

Let's you and I embark on life in that same hope – no, a stronger hope. Because in that long line of Eve's descendants a child did come who was given another name. The angel said, "He shall be called, Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). That Seed has saved you from sin's guilt and its consequences – in your childbearing, in your marriage, in your work, wherever there is a thorn or thistle growing. In this life the curse has been shattered and one day it will disappear altogether. Let His blood and Spirit wash you clean and give you a new start, with new life from above.

AMEN!

## THE WAY HOME

*So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After He drove the man out, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.*

– Genesis 3:23,24



Today we arrive at the closing scene in chapter 3, the closing scene in the Garden of Eden. We've seen how God planted this garden in the east with His own hand, how He placed man there to keep it and to till it. We have watched intently as the LORD created for Adam a wife out of his own rib and brought her to the man there in that garden, in that Paradise of God. We've eagerly looked into this garden to catch a glimpse of man living with his God in harmonious fellowship, of husband and wife working in love as a team to fulfil God's commandments.

But now this morning we must bid "farewell" to this garden. For we've also seen how man ruined the garden by listening to the serpent. We've also observed how man wanted to be wiser than God but ended up hiding in fear from God. With tears in our eyes, we've watched how the husband blamed both his God and his wife for his own sin, how the wife blamed the serpent for her sin and how all three were punished. We've seen the LORD

enter the garden not in pristine fellowship but in judgment. And now at last we see today that man must exit the garden altogether. Sin changes everything. And yet God is greater than sin.

I proclaim to you this Word of God,

*For man's hope, the LORD drives him out of His presence*

**The LORD thus:**

1. Checks our depravity
2. Covers our shame
3. Preserves our home

### Checks our depravity

It is indeed a very sad scene. The Garden of Eden was man's first home and now he is forced to leave it. We should notice that man does not *willingly* go out on his own. He is not leaving the garden of his own free will to exercise dominion over other parts of God's creation, to till and cultivate land outside of it. No, in fact we can say he was forcibly evicted from the garden by God Himself, v.23, "So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden..." And again in v.24, "After He drove man out..." The LORD, as it were, pushed man out of Paradise.

Later in Scripture we read of the Lord Jesus forming a whip of cords and "driving out" the money changers in the temple (the same verb is used. See John 2:15). Man was not given any time. There is a certain urgency and necessity about this action. Man was not going to stroll out on his own accord but he was forced out – we might say today that Adam and Eve were "kicked out" of the garden.

Have you ever had to leave your home, brothers and sisters? I think for any of us who had to leave our first home, the one we grew up in, or perhaps our first home we had as a married couple, the home we raised our children

in, that it's not that easy to leave, is it? And that difficulty is only compounded when you are *forced* to move against your will – it can break your heart to leave the home you love. Well, how much more, then, for Adam and Eve!

For this home of theirs was not just a cozy corner of the world they could call their own. No, this garden was the one planted by the LORD – it was God's garden! Remember that this garden was like a giant arboretum or park, filled with trees, shrubs, flowers, and meadows, with pathways and fields, with animals of every variety. It was of itself a most pleasant place to live but what made it the best place on earth was that God Himself lived there too! The Creator put man in this garden Paradise as a place where He could walk and talk with them, a place where He could come in the cool of the day and speak with them as Father to children.

But now they are forced out! Now they are cut off from that regular fellowship, driven out from the presence of the LORD. What a terrible loss! To lose the physical environment of the Garden of Eden is one thing – and that was bad enough – but to lose that close contact with God, to no longer commune with Him face to face, as it were, that was a tragedy almost too much for man to bear. Man was more than evicted from Eden; he was excommunicated from that perfect fellowship with His Maker.

And man deserved this, of course. Actually, we deserved much more, didn't we? We saw that last time, how man's sin by rights earned him immediate, complete and eternal death, and yet God promised life! When man and wife should have been wiped out, the LORD preserved them under the curse and promised relief through a future Son, and now here too we get much less than we deserve! We are cast out of God's presence because of our sin and yet there is mercy in this punishment as well.

For look with me at the LORD's reasoning in v.22. We read, "And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." Now, a lot of people question

what the LORD means when He says, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” Is the LORD agreeing with Satan who said to Eve that “when you eat of the fruit your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil?” Has man really become like God?

It sounds at first like Satan was right about God protecting His own position as the only all-knowing one. Satan had made the LORD out to be a stingy God who wanted to keep man from becoming like Him. And now the LORD appears to protect His position again for He says of man, “He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” According to Satan’s way of explaining things, this would be God’s attempt to keep man at bay. Man now has the same knowledge as God but the LORD won’t allow him to live forever like God does. God will put a stop to that possibility right away and jealously guard His own uniqueness.

But we know this can’t be the right explanation, for man did not become like God in *every* way but only in *one* limited sense – knowing good and evil! God is perfect and holy, but man, as we have seen, became a depraved sinner with no good inside him anymore. He hates God and runs from him. He hates his neighbour and tries to preserve himself. Nor did man gain all the knowledge in the universe as God knows it for then he would never have tried to make an apron of fig leaves to cover his shame.

The truth is, man became like God in one restricted way: he knew good and evil and yet even that knowledge is different from God’s. God knows evil only from afar, only in others, only as disobedience in His creatures. There is no evil, no sin, no unrighteousness in God whatsoever! Man, on the other hand, now knows evil from personal experience, from within. Because he has been made in God’s image, man understands what good is, but having believed the lie of the devil he now truly knows what evil is too, because it lives with him and is part of him. We know sin because we *are* sinners, we know evil because we *are* evil!

And then you can see God’s purpose in banishing us from His presence and particularly from the tree of life. The LORD underlines that point again in v.24, “After He drove the man out, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.” The cherubim are special angels of the LORD that are always close to His presence. We find them in Scripture woven into the curtains of the Most Holy Place. They also kneel over the lid of the ark of the covenant. Where the cherubim are, there is God Himself! They signal the LORD’s special dwelling place.

And notice that the cherubim are on guard duty here! And with them a “flaming sword flashing back and forth.” This is quite a picture. The text literally speaks of “the cherubim” and “the flaming sword” turning itself around and around. In other words, the sword is separate and distinct from the cherubim. It mentions these guards separately: cherubim and a sword. So the picture we get is something like this: two angels and then out in front of them a flaming sword suspended in the air, flashing back and forth. The sword by itself is already a weapon of destruction, but now with unceasing fire flaming from it and with an invisible hand wielding it back and forth, it speaks of swift and severe judgment from above. Symbols of the divine presence alongside a symbol of the divine wrath would be enough to deter even the dullest of humans from passing that way. And the thing that was of such importance to guard and protect was access to the tree of life.

In doing that, brothers and sisters, the LORD was not protecting His own turf from man, but He was protecting us from ourselves! For imagine if we had been allowed to eat from the tree of life. The LORD had, by His own Word, attached the promise of life to the eating of that tree. Man had to make a choice which tree to eat from there in the middle of the garden – the one tree would lead to everlasting life, the other to everlasting death. Man was initially permitted to eat from the tree of life but he chose instead to eat from the forbidden tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

If he were to now eat from this tree of life, man would live forever but – and here’s the rub – not in *harmony* with God, but in *disharmony*! Man would live forever in his condition *after* he sinned! Man would live forever *as a fallen creature*, as a rebel, a miserable, depraved being. The tree of life could only extend life but it could not take away sin, and that’s what we need so badly!

Can you imagine, brothers and sisters, living forever as we presently are? In our sin and misery? In our brokenness? In our despair? No one looks kindly upon death of itself, but Beloved the one thing worse than death is living this life forever! This life of strife, of tension, of wickedness and evil, filled with broken hearts and broken dreams. The LORD did us a tremendous favour by cutting us off from the tree! It was His way of checking our depravity! Man will not live forever with his evil heart and perverted nature! The LORD cast us out of His presence, away from the tree of life to give us hope for a new and better life! A better life where our shame is taken away.

### Covers our shame

For even before the LORD sent man out of the garden He gave Him a sign of hope. We read about that in v.21, “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” It’s another one of those little details in the text we often pass over quickly, but brothers and sisters ask yourself this question, why did the LORD God, Creator of heaven and earth, get into the tailoring business, so to speak? Why does God concern himself with the clothes of man?

A lot of people today, even members of the church don’t think God is interested in our physical clothing. People will say things like, “my outward appearance doesn’t matter because God sees my heart.” I wonder, then, what they think of this verse. As if God is only God of my *insides* and not my *outsides*, as if He is only interested in my soul and not my body – didn’t God create both, Beloved? Didn’t the Creator put your soul into your *body*? How

can anyone say, “What goes on my body is of no concern to the Lord?”

I want to dwell on this a moment because for some it is a problem. Some people compartmentalize their religion into little boxes where God has say over a number of areas, but there’s a few areas where God is kept out. *God has a say over my heart, over what I believe, over my Sunday worship, over my family devotions, over my moral choices, over my choice of employment, but God has no say over what I purchase off the rack or what I put on in the mornings – that’s just the exterior anyway! What I do in my heart or what I do with my heart is the LORD’s concern, but how I clothe my body is strictly my own affair.* Brothers and sisters you can’t put God into a box! And you can’t leave God out of your decisions when you’re standing in the clothing store or when you are looking into the mirror – He is God of *all* of your life! And He is definitely concerned with outer clothing because your *inner* guilt is manifested in *outer* shame. Remember: Adam and Eve were *naked* and they were *ashamed*.

So ashamed were they, you recall, that they immediately sewed fig leaves together and covered themselves. Adam and Eve had the instinct to cover themselves up, but our world today *denies* sin and shame and has the instinct to uncover themselves! In a world that increasingly has no conscience anymore, that hardens itself over against the law of God, it is no wonder that nakedness, nudity, and the revealing of the flesh is becoming more in vogue, more permissible, more part of society.

As little as twenty years ago prime-time television had standards for the level of nudity permitted. Shameless nakedness was available then, only you had to pay for it. Now it’s to the point where you can’t watch any prime-time TV anymore – even the non-cable version – without regularly meeting sexually explicit language and scenes. The world has cast off even the fig-leaf and that trend has found its way into the church.

The LORD in His mercy went further and gave us animal skins to better *cover up* our shame but some of us are racing back to the fig leaf and *exposing* more of ourselves! Tell me, brothers and sisters, when you dress



yourself are you heading in the direction of the skimpy fig leaf or the God-honouring animal skin? Do you look to reveal your flesh and advertise your sexuality as if you've got nothing to hide or do remember your shame and honour your God by dressing modestly as He once dressed our first parents?

For the fig leaves were not enough to hide their shame from God. The very moment the LORD entered into the garden the man and his wife went running to hide behind the trees because those pathetic fig leaves which they had stitched together were see-through to the Creator. They could not escape from their guilt, from their shame by their own human covering or by their own human method of run and hide. But after the LORD has both punished them and promised deliverance, He takes time to properly cover their shame and clothe them honourably. Before He sends them out into the world, He first clothes them so they no longer have to run and hide from their God.

And look at the clothing He chooses, v.21, "The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" – garments of *skin*. The LORD did not take cotton from the cotton plant and spin two wonderful suits of clothing for them. He did not weave together bigger leaves or tall grass into splendid outfits. Nor did the LORD even take the wool of the sheep and make two beautiful woollen garments. Instead He took two animals, killed them, and clothed Adam and his wife with the skins!

You see, brothers and sisters, the LORD shed blood in order to cover the shame of His children! Physical death, *full* death *did* come into the garden that day only not to Adam and Eve as it should have but to two animals who died in their place, and that is what *really* takes away man's shame! That is what allows man to continue living on the earth without running and hiding from God every time He would approach – they were covered by the blood!

This is what gave Adam and Eve tremendous hope, for that shedding of blood, that sacrifice of life spoke to them of another great sacrifice that

would come in future, that of the great Seed of the Woman! He would one day come and shed not the blood of animals but His own blood in order to cover man's shame!

And is that not exactly what He did, brothers and sisters? The Lord Jesus let Himself be sacrificed in our place, He let our punishment fall on His head so that all our guilt could be taken away. He let Himself be put to shame too. Did you know that the Lord Jesus was without clothing as He hung on the cross? He let the soldiers gamble for His clothing at the foot of the cross while He hung in all humiliation, with all His shame exposed. He did that so that you and I could be clothed with the white robes of His righteousness! He let himself be uncovered so that we might always be covered in the sight of God.

When you dress yourself in the morning, remember how Christ let himself be stripped bare for your sake. Your shame has been covered by His blood – will you now expose your shame again by revealing your flesh for all to see? Let your outward clothing reflect your inner covering from above.

And with that divine clothing we may look forward to our return home, into God's presence.

### **Preserves our home**

For there is something else marvellous about our text: Paradise is *not* destroyed! It would have been a simple matter for the LORD to burn up at least the Garden of Eden – to send fire from heaven and consume what had been the place where God met with man. He certainly could have at least cut down the tree of life and that would have solved the problem of man not eating from it in his depravity. Man had ruined Paradise, man had brought the seed of destruction into the world and yet though God blocks the way to the tree of life, He does not remove the tree. Man can't get into the Garden of Eden, but he can still see it, and that brings a strengthening of hope!

For think about that, Beloved. Adam and Eve were driven east of the garden, but not entirely *away* from the garden. In chapter 4 Cain will be driven away altogether from the place called Eden, so it follows that Adam and Eve were still living in Eden at that time! When they were banished from the garden they could and they did live adjacent to it in Eden. Every day they saw their old home. Every day they saw the cherubim standing guard and blocking their way and they shivered at the sight of that flaming sword, but nevertheless every day they saw the way things used to be. The LORD preserved the garden as a testimony to them that though for now the way is blocked, yet the tree of life still exists! The source of life established by God is not destroyed! The message is: one day it will be re-opened and God's people will be given access again to that tree!

The way to the tree of life was obstructed by a flaming sword and two cherubim. Anyone who passed that way would die. But there was one who was willing to pass that way: Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus travelled the road that led to a confrontation with God's wrath. He willingly gave His life to the flaming sword in order to put to rest the fierce anger of His Father. He willingly laid down His life on the tree of cursing in order to clear for us the way to the tree of life! To bring God's people into the company of the cherubim and seraphim around the throne of God to sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty" (cf. Hymn 4:1).

That way is open now for you and for me and for all who repent and believe. That was Christ's promise to His church at Ephesus, that's His promise to His church here today: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." Jesus unbars the way. Paradise has not been lost. It's just being preserved. And the tree of life is not destroyed. It's waiting for us.

Let's go there, to the new Paradise of God, our new home. The Lord Jesus once said, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go

and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2,3). The Father no longer has a garden but a house, even a city for us to dwell in. The Son is home with the Father now and has a place there for all His chosen ones. And one day all who put their trust in Him will go there too – home with our Father, home with our Brother, home with our Lord! That is hope, a certain hope, an unshakeable hope, a hope which softens every sorrow!

Amen!

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

In the preparation of a sermon, in addition to his own work on the text, a preacher consults a variety of sources, each of which impacts his thinking in some way. I very much appreciated this weekly interaction. Apart from the standard lexicons and dictionaries, the following sources are the ones which I most regularly consulted throughout this series of sermons:

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## *APPENDIX*

CHAPTER	TEXT:	SCRIPTURE READING:	SONG SELECTION:
<b>1</b>	Genesis <b>1:1-2</b>	Ecclesiastes <b>11:7-12:14</b> John <b>1:1-5</b>	Psalm <b>33: 1,2</b> Psalm <b>90: 1,7</b> Psalm <b>104:1,7</b> Psalm <b>145: 2,3</b> Psalm <b>33: 4,6</b>
<b>2</b>	Genesis <b>1:3-25</b>	Genesis <b>1:3-25</b>	Psalm <b>19: 1,2</b> Psalm <b>126: 1,2</b> Psalm <b>102: 1,2,3</b> Psalm <b>102: 9,10,11</b> Hymn <b>60: 1,3,4</b>
<b>3</b>	Genesis <b>1:26-27</b>	Colossians <b>1:1-23</b> Romans <b>8:1-17</b>	Psalm <b>148: 1,2</b> Psalm <b>8: 1,2</b> Psalm <b>8: 3,4,5</b> Hymn <b>37: 3,4</b> Psalm <b>148: 3,4</b>
<b>4</b>	Genesis <b>1:28</b>	Genesis <b>1:26-2:25</b>	Hymn <b>35: 1,2</b> Hymn <b>35: 3</b> Psalm <b>127: 1,2,3</b> Psalm <b>72: 1,5</b> Hymn <b>35: 4,5</b>
<b>5</b>	Genesis <b>2:1-3</b>	Mark <b>2:23-3:6</b>	Psalm <b>92: 1,2,3</b> Psalm <b>62: 1,4</b> Psalm <b>77: 1,2,3</b> Hymn <b>7: 2,5</b> Psalm <b>92: 4,5,6</b>

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CHAPTER	TEXT:	SCRIPTURE READING:	SONG SELECTION:
6	Genesis 2:4-14	Revelation 21:1-8; v.22-22:6	Psalm 84: 1,2 Psalm 15: 1,2,3 Psalm 46: 1,2 Psalm 25: 5,6 Hymn 55: 1-5
7	Genesis 2:18-23	Proverbs 31:10-31	Psalm 47: 1,3 Psalm 69: 1,2,5 Psalm 19: 1,2 Psalm 128: 1,2,3 Hymn 50: 1,2,3
8	Genesis 1:26-27	Matthew 19:1-12 Ephesians 5:21-33	Psalm 63: 1,2 Psalm 119: 12 Psalm 45: 1,4,5 Psalm 63: 3,4 Hymn 50: 4,5,6
9	Genesis 2:9b & 16-17	Revelation 22	Psalm 66:1,2 Psalm 66:4,5 Psalm 81:6-10 Psalm 63:2 Psalm 18:1,7
10	Genesis 3:1-7	Matthew 4:1-11	Hymn 2: 1,5 Psalm 119: 3,4 Psalm 36: 1 Psalm 36: 2,3 Hymn 43: 1,2,3

*APPENDIX*

CHAPTER	TEXT:	SCRIPTURE READING:	SONG SELECTION:
11	Genesis 3:8-15	Job 40:1-24; 42:1-6	Psalm 24: 1,2,3 Psalm 12: 1,2,4 Psalm 40: 5,6 Psalm 118: 1,4 Psalm 124: 1,2,3
12	Genesis 3:16-20	Romans 5:1-11 Ephesians 5:22-6:9	Psalm 90: 1,2 Psalm 90: 4,5 Psalm 127: 1,2,3 Psalm 103: 4,5 Psalm 30: 1,2,3
13	Genesis 3:21-24	Exodus 36:35-37:9 Revelation 2:1-7	Hymn 4: 1,2 Psalm 6: 1,3,6 Psalm 25: 1,2 Psalm 25: 5,10 Hymn 4: 3,4